HOW THE UNITED STATES GOT INVOLVED IN VIETNAM

by ROBERT SCHEER

Vietnam is a small elongated territory (127,300 square miles) that contains a variegated and divided population of Buddhists, Catholics, primitive tribesmen, Chinese, Vietnamese (Southern and Northern), Cambodians, Thais, and others. The turbulent history of these people predates the Christian era. The country has been divided more often than not, and the periods of self-rule have been infrequent and scattered. The Chinese ruled for a thousand years, the French held it as a protectorate for eighty, and the Japanese occupied it during World War II. Nationalism developed during these periods of colonial rule and in the unsettled atmosphere of the twentieth century it found political expression. It became intense in opposition to French rule during the decade preceding World War II, when the Viet Minh—the Independence League, led by the Communist Ho Chi Minh—emerged as the most prominent of the many movements and programs aimed at securing independence for Vietnam.

At the onset of World War II, the United States did not consider Indochina, of which Vietnam was then one of three Associated States, to be of critical importance. When the Japanese were threatening to seize Vietnam in June, 1940, the French Governor-General asked the United States if it would supply 120 planes and anti-aircraft guns to support a resistance. Under-Secretary of State Sumner Welles made it clear that his country did not want to become involved, and when asked by

the French if there was any alternative to surrender to the Japanese Welles replied: ". . . it is what I would do in your place."

In World War II, President Roosevelt felt strongly that the French had failed in their commitments to stand up to the Germans and he was loath to see them regain their empire at the war's end. At the same time he did not advocate independence for France's Asiatic colonies. At a press conference on February 23, 1945, he touched on this question and on that of the usefulness of Indochina to China:

> The first thing I asked Chiang was, "Do you want Indo-China?" He said, "It's no help to us. We don't want it. They are not Chinese. They would not assimilate into the Chinese people." I said, "What are you going to advocate? It will take a long time to educate for self-government."

Elliot Roosevelt reported that his father told him, en route to the Casablanca conference:

> The native Indochinese have been so flagrantly down-trodden that they thought to themselves: Anything must be better than to live under French colonial rule!...Don't think for a moment...that Americans would be dying tonight if it had not been for the short-sighted greed of the French, the British and the Dutch.

At the Yalta conference Roosevelt suggested a trusteeship for Indochina, but whatever plans he may have had for the area died with him. In the post-war shuffle hopes for "gradual" Vietnamese independence were lost in the great power struggle.

For a time, Ho Chi Minh seems to have believed that the United States would sponsor Vietnamese independence. He took the wartime alliance seriously and thought that the "Allies" would fulfill their promises for post-war self-determination. The Viet Minh had collaborated with American agents of the Office of Strategic Services during the war, and the O.S.S. chief in Hanoi after the war, Major Patti, was partisan to its cause and hostile to French plans to return. The Vietnamese Declaration of Independence, which Ho announced on September 2, 1945, began with words taken from

the U.S. Declaration of Independence: "All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

The prevailing view today would doubtless write this off as a Communist trick to win U.S. support. But U.S. military forces in China during the war had supplied the Viet Minh with arms and had supported it in its jockeying for power in the first few months. It is possible that the Viet Minh's optimistic view toward the United States was genuine and was dissipated only by implicit American support for the French in the period that followed. Ellen Hammer in *The Struggle for Indochina* described the post-war feeling toward the United States:

> ...American political stock had been high in Hanoi in August and September of 1945, when the name of the United States evoked associations with the Declaration of Independence, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and the Atlantic Charter; and American O.S.S. agents had not hidden their sympathy for Vietnamese aspirations. But the United States, it was soon clear, would do nothing to aid the Viet Minh.

The Viet Minh had opposed both the French and the Japanese during the war and was in a position to lead a new nationalist government at its end. When, in the last stages, the Japanese assumed the formal power in Vietnam that had been held by their French collaborators, the Viet Minh began an all-out war against them. The Japanese surrender to the Allies in August of 1945 was the signal for the Viet Minh forces under Nguyen Giap to move on Hanoi in North Vietnam. They had succeeded in identifying themselves with the Allied victory that was expected to produce nationhood for Vietnam and, as Ellen Hammer notes, "Its [Viet Minh] prestige was enormous."

In August, 1945, the Emperor, Bao Dai, agreed to abdicate in favor of the Viet Minh. As the Declaration of Independence stated, "Our people has . . . overthrown the monarchic constitution that had reigned supreme for so many centuries." In meeting with the Viet Minh delegates, the Emperor, for the first

time in Vietnamese history, shook the hand of one of his subjects; the Imperial Flag was pulled down, and henceforth Bao Dai would be known as Citizen Vinh Thuy. On September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh read the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence to cheering crowds in Hanoi. "Never before," Miss Hammer writes, "had Vietnam seemed so united."

In January of 1946, the Viet Minh attempted to legitimize its rule by conducting elections for a national assembly, which, though it proved to be hardly an ideal democratic exercise, was nevertheless a significant political event. Donald Lancaster, a student of this period and formerly a political officer in the British legation in Saigon, wrote in *The Emancipation of French Indochina:*

> The elections, which were held in Tonking, Annam, and, clandestinely, in some parts of Cochin-China, were attended by many irregularities and by some evidence of a readiness to fabricate returns; nevertheless, the results, which gave the Viet Minh a clear majority in the Assembly, were probably fairly indicative of the state of public opinion at that time.

During this period Ho Chi Minh, Giap, and other Communist leaders in the Viet Minh were stressing the nationalist part of their program at the expense of more radical social doctrines in the interest of maximum unity. In reality, however, the appeal of the "nationalist" revolution lay in the expectation that the political change itself, throwing out the French and their local agents, would produce basic economic and social changes.

Although the Communist Party had been officially dissolved, the leaders of the Viet Minh were Communists, and the citizenry was soon to realize what it meant to live in a nation undergoing a Communist revolution. From the very beginning, the Viet Minh set about organizing the country along "Communist" lines. It formed "Peoples Committees," which approximated "Soviets," at all levels throughout the countryside. Power in the villages was taken from the Council of Notables and placed in the hands of the Peoples Committees, which were given broad responsibilities over individual and social life.

There were the typical mass organizations, the militia, and, of course, continuous indoctrination sessions.

As in most nationalist movements, the Viet Minh exaggerated the sins of the mother country. In Ho's Declaration of Independence the French were indicted for having "stripped our fellow citizens of everything they possessed, impoverishing the individual and devastating the land.... They have robbed us of our rice fields, our mines, our forests, our raw materials." In any event, the Viet Minh had set up the first independent government in eighty years and the first one in a thousand years that was not monarchical.

Still, this impressive display of independence did not deter the French colony in Vietnam (including the rubber plantation owners) and their sympathizers in Paris from working toward a return of French control. Donald Lancaster summarized their position:

> ...French administrators, planters, and businessmen who were living under the protection of Allied bayonets in Saigon were slow to realize the depth and passion of a popular movement inspired by ardent patriotism, weariness of European tutelage, and a desire for social justice; and these representatives of a vanished regime continued to proclaim their obstinate and ill-founded belief that with firmness and the application of force the crises could be surmounted and the French re-established in their former privileges....

These dreams of a French restoration were advanced by the British who had been assigned the task of accepting the Japanese surrender at the end of World War II and of maintaining order in the southern half of Vietnam. This objective soon came into conflict with a Vietnamese populace bent on extending to the South the independence already decreed in the North. As early as September 22, 1945, the British permitted the rearming of French troops who had been held under guard by the Vietnamese. The counter-revolution was on.

The French soon controlled the city of Saigon and other parts of the South. In the following two years there was a series of military skirmishes, widespread atrocities, and acts of terror perpetrated by all sides, coupled with endless rounds of negotia-

to the government's laxity in matters of economic development. To quote another Michigan State economist: "The economic solution to the problem of economic growth in Vietnam is relatively simple; the real problems, the serious problems, lie in the area of administration and politics."

South Vietnam, with a minute capital investment, one quarter of the working class of its largest city unemployed, and most of the rural population working a four-month year, devoured incredible amounts of American aid to provide consumer goods for its privileged and government classes.

THE 'MIRACLE' COLLAPSES

In 1959 the "miracle" bubble of Vietnam burst; it had been nothing more than a miracle of public relations. In the spring of that year the correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal* (April 2, 1959) took an accounting of the miracle and concluded: "... the accomplishment, so far, rests on American aid. Without that aid there would be no Vietnam!" In July of 1959, Albert M. Colegrove, a veteran Scripps-Howard reporter, went to Vietnam and came back with the "dirt" on the traditionally vulnerable foreign program. When reported to the two and one-half million readers of the newspaper chain, it created a stir. Colegrove was primarily concerned with "waste" in the program —unnecessary freezers for Americans, excessive allowances, graft—and was outraged that military vehicles were unaccounted for and that Americans lived in villas with an excessive number of servants.

Colegrove was summoned to Washington for a hearing before the Mansfield Subcommittee, accompanied by his publisher. Colegrove in no way disputed the basis of the American program; he agreed that we were needed there to protect the

freedom of the Vietnamese against the Communist intruders. The closest he came to criticism of the purposes was when he said:

> After several years we keep talking about the courageous government and I'll grant you that they are courageous. But it is four or five long years since the crises there. . . . After several years of American aid and alleged guidance, Vietnam still has the same problem as bad as ever.

After a battery of questions, some of which challenged his mental competence and his patriotism, Colegrove tried to get back into the mainstream:

> I do not think there is any doubt but what the main mission . . . has been accomplished. It is just the cost which I question. . . . I think that the present government of Vietnam is—well, I think it is a miracle that it exists; that it has overcome almost unbelievable obstacles; that we can be thankful that President Diem moved into that situation when he did.

The next major critical note in the dialogue was struck by William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick in *The Ugly American:* Uncle Sam was too bureaucratic and tended to get involved in grandiose projects of economic development that never reached the people. The solution proposed by the authors was to let more "average, common-sense" Americans loose to impart their know-how to the natives. But the real problem in Vietnam was the opposite—the U.S. had *not* invested in serious programs of economic development—and the strangest thing about the novel is that it wholly ignored the military nature of the foreign aid program.

The Ugly American is pure American homespun. In it, there are no serious political revolutions, but only misunderstandings caused by stuffed shirts and bureaucrats who get in the way of the good guys who are out to destroy evil. It is comic-book politics and its central hero is a Steve Canyon type named Col. Hillindale. Yet this gross over-simplification of foreign policy was accepted as serious social criticism, as proof of the healthi-

to the South Vietnamese government to pay for its army and civil service. A high rate of imports was encouraged by U.S. acceptance of a very low official exchange rate of 35/1 (as compared with 75/1 free market), which meant that the importer was actually obtaining goods at half their real cost. On the basis of available evidence, provided by the Michigan State economists and other experts, it is apparent that at least three-fourths of American aid was used for the importation of either consumer goods or raw materials for the production of consumer goods.

The aid program was intended to provide an atmosphere of prosperity and to insure political support for the Diem administration. But it was also considered necessary in order to build a military apparatus in South Vietnam capable of containing the Communists, and the bulk of economic aid thus was channelled to pay the army and support the government. In Vietnam, as elsewhere, most of what is called "economic aid" in the U.S. foreign aid program is actually "defense support." As the Mansfield Senate Subcommittee pointed out in 1960,

> The subcommittee was impressed by the apparently far greater degree of effectiveness in the administration of the military, as contrasted with non-military aid programs in Vietnam. A number of reasons seem to underlie the difference. Certainly the former has been, from the outset, the tail that wags the dog. The military aid program has had first and predominant call on aid funds. In fact the non-military programs were developed largely in response to that call and continue to operate primarily on that basis. By far the greatest part of the so-called economic aid in Vietnam takes the form of defense support and, hence, has been channeled indirectly into the military aid program.

Aside from paying the total cost of the South Vietnamese army, the United States paid for most other expenditures of the South Vietnamese government. Official estimates of the percentage of South Vietnam's budget borne by U.S. aid vary from 60 to 75 per cent. Even this underestimates the real dependence on U.S. aid: the bulk of the taxes collected by the South Vietnamese government were from imports. This permitted the South Vietnamese government to impose a high rate of taxation without halting imports because the United States accepted the cut-rate 35/1 exchange.

The inability of the Diem government to collect taxes except from U.S.-subsidized imports reflected its administrative weakness and lack of contact with the population. One M.S.U. economist made the observation upon his return that

> . . . Vietnam today still remains the prototype of a dependent economy, its levels of national income as dependent on outside forces as was the case when the country was a French colony. After six years of large-scale American aid, Vietnam is becoming a permanent mendicant. Certainly, if aid were eliminated tomorrow, there would be an unpaid army and unfed civilians. American aid has built a castle on sand.

Aside from the preoccupation with military security, the U.S. aid program was handicapped by its commitment to private enterprise. It favored the subsidized import program to preserve the private sector and aid its expansion. The Diem government recognized that unplanned private investment would not be sufficient and it therefore attempted to develop a system of planning and government investment. But the United States would not allow its aid to be used in support of this program. John Montgomery noted in *The Politics of Foreign Aid:*

> . . . The United States permitted capital equipment to be imported under the program only for privately owned and operated enterprises, while for its part the Vietnamese government, unwilling to permit any basic industries to be controlled by French or Chinese, demanded the right to a majority of stock in all important enterprises.

Only 20 per cent of American economic aid was assigned to specific social and economic projects, and much of this was for military support programs with, at best, indirect development value, e.g., the highway program (40 per cent of project aid). The rate of investment was far below that required to keep up with the 3 per cent annual growth in population. The fact that foreign reserves increased as much as they did testifies

tions between the French and the Viet Minh. By the end of 1947, the French called back ex-Emperor Bao Dai to lead the country.

At first, the United States had been merely apathetic about Vietnamese independence. But then the cold war began. William C. Bullitt, who in October, 1947, had called for open U.S. intervention in China in an article in *Life* magazine, sounded the alarm against Ho Chi Minh in the same magazine in December. Bullitt, American Ambassador to the French Government-in-Exile in London during the war, had met Bao Dai and is reported to have urged his opposition to the Viet Minh-led government, implying that this development would more readily call forth American support for Vietnam. He figures in many accounts as the inspiration of the French support for Bao Dai as a nationalist alternative to the Viet Minh. According to Ellen Hammer,

> Bullitt's prestige was great in France and his words were invested by Frenchmen with a semi-official character; his support for Bao Dai was interpreted by a number of people, particularly among the French Left, to mean American support for Bao Dai and it contributed to the conviction, widely held among Frenchmen, that the United States had taken an initiative in launching the Bao Dai policy.

In his *Life* article, Bullitt concentrated on the thesis that Communists under Ho Chi Minh had "captured" the leadership of the independence movement. Having defined Ho as a Communist, Bullitt ruled out any possibility of his independence of action or genuine dedication to the cause of Vietnamese independence. Any promises Ho made "would be broken as soon as he should receive orders from Moscow to break them...." Ho's movement was designed to "add another finger to the hand that Stalin is closing around China." Bullitt both admonished and advised the French:

> If the French government could bring itself to realize that the days of mercantile colonialism are over, it could still preserve all the real interests of France in Vietnam and end the war by a series of relatively simple actions.

The chief action, of course, was the development of a nationalist alternative (Bao Dai) "for the elimination of the Communists." Bullitt's thesis translated Vietnam's political struggles into cold war terminology. Bao Dai was the first of a series of native anti-Communists demanded by the script; later, he would be denounced as a "puppet" and Diem would be proposed as the alternative; and then Khan, and so on. The failure of the translation was that it overlooked the internal history of the country and proposed to create a "nationalist" government by fiat of a foreign nation. It was a program based primarily on the needs of America's anti-Communist foreign policy. A revolution to rival that of the Communists would have had to respond to the felt needs of the Vietnamese people. The preoccupations of U.S. policy were never those of a majority of Vietnamese, and this has been at the root of the failure. But by then the bipartisan cold war consensus had come into being and the Bullitt thesis would be considered only in the most grandiose terms of East-West ideological confrontation.

1949-1954

In March, 1949, the so-called Elysée Accords, under which the French recognized Bao Dai as chief of state, granted his government minimal responsibilities within an over-all pattern of French control through the French Union. The Accords left matters of defense and foreign relations under French control. French nationals were still to be tried under French law, and business and property that belonged to French citizens could not be tampered with without the consent of the French government.

The U.S. State Department announced that Bao Dai was "making sincere efforts to unite all truly nationalist elements within Vietnam," and it hoped that the Elysée agreements "will

form the basis for the progressive realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Vietnamese people." Thus, on February 7, 1950, the United States recognized the Bao Dai government. It added that "it anticipated" that the agreement between the ex-Emperor and the French would lead to "the growth of effective democratic institutions." And in May, 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson wrote in the Department of State *Bulletin:*

> The United States Government, convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exists in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its according economic aid and military equipment to the Associated States of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development.

On June 27, 1950, President Truman announced that he had "directed acceleration in the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of France and the Associated States in Indochina and the dispatch of a military mission to provide close working relations with those forces." This step-up came after the start of the war in Korea and was undoubtedly viewed by the Administration as an operation, on another flank, against the same enemy.

Between 1950 and 1954, the United States sent $2.6 billion worth of military and economic aid to the French in Vietnam (80 per cent of the cost of the war)—$800 million during 1950-52 but $1.8 billion in 1953 and 1954 in response to the imminent French collapse. Senator Mansfield's Subcommittee on State Department Organization and Public Affairs reported in 1954 that French forces outnumbered those of the Viet Minh by a factor of 5 to 3 and "as a result largely of American assistance . . . the non-Communist forces possessed great superiority—estimated as high as 10-1 in armaments, and the flow of American aid was constant and increasingly heavy."

Why, then, did the French lose the war? The right wing in America has suggested that it was lost because the Administration was not fully committed to a "win" policy. According to

this view, "winning" required a show of strength to the Kremlin with the full commitment of American power in men and weapons.

The idea of a mass attack had been entertained. "Operation Vulture," a joint French-American plan, called for the obliteration of the Viet Minh through the onslaught of 300 carrier-based fighter bombers and sixty heavy bombers from the Philippines. At the request of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. aircraft carriers had been sent to the Indochinese coast. Two of the aircraft were rumored at the time to be loaded with atomic bombs, and Secretary of State Dulles is reported to have hinted in Paris that the United States might launch an atomic attack.

President Eisenhower, however, was reluctant to allow Americans to be dragged further into the war. This was due in part to the opposition of our allies, particularly England, and to American exhaustion with war following Korea. But there was also the President's belief that a military victory was not possible because of the political situation: the people supported the Viet Minh and identified Ho Chi Minh as the leader of their independence movement. As Eisenhower stated some years later in his memoirs, *Mandate for Change,*

> The enemy had much popular sympathy, and many civilians aided them by providing both shelter and information. The French still had sufficient forces to win if they could induce the regular Vietnamese soldiers to fight vigorously with them and the populace to support them. But guerrilla warfare cannot work two ways; normally only one side can enjoy reliable citizen help.

In other words, Bao Dai, the anti-Communist nationalist alternative, whom the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations had backed, had failed to undercut the appeal of the Viet Minh. Eisenhower was

> convinced that the French could not win the war because the internal political situation in Vietnam, weak and confused, badly weakened their military position. I have never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgeable in Indochinese affairs who

did not agree that had elections been held as of the time of the fighting, possibly 80% of the populace would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader rather than Chief of State Bao Dai. As one Frenchman said to me, "What Vietnam needs is another Syngman Rhee, regardless of all the difficulties the presence of such a personality would entail."

The fact that the United States declined to be involved further at this point undercut that minority of French leaders who wanted to continue a war that the majority of the French population had opposed for years. With the decisive defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the French sued for peace at a conference in Geneva in the spring of 1954.

The negotiations began on May 8, 1954, one day after the fall of Dien Bien Phu, and were concluded on July 21. With hindsight, the meetings at Geneva form a remarkable interlude in the cold war. England, China, and the Soviet Union were a strange group of "peacemakers" urging conciliation on the part of the "belligerents"—France and the Viet Minh. The United States was off to the side, being "handled" by the English and French as a powerful, though not always wise, party that could easily upset the delicate negotiations. Dulles did not approve of their drift and withdrew from the conference, leaving his Under-Secretary, Walter Bedell Smith, as leader of the U.S. delegation. It seemed that the price of peace would involve surrendering control of some portion of the country to the Communists, and the United States was not able to oppose this since it was not willing to become any more deeply involved.

However, although resigned to a military settlement that would concede territory to the Viet Minh, the United States was far from willing to accept the decisions of the conference as determining factors in the ultimate *political* solution for Vietnam. Instead, the United States was soon to place its hope for a favorable political outcome on "a new anti-Communist nationalist alternative." Bao Dai was, by now, unacceptable; American policy came to center around a man whom Bao Dai, then in Paris, had chosen as his new Premier, Ngo Dinh Diem.

THE CHOICE OF DIEM

Diem, who was also in Paris at the time, accepted the offer on June 18, 1954, and formally organized his government on July 7. His appointment had little effect on the Geneva negotiations, which were still in process, but it was ultimately to have grave consequences for the implementation of the final agreements at Geneva. It signaled the start of a new phase of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Although there is still doubt about the degree of American responsibility for Diem's selection, Donald Lancaster's statement seems acceptable: "the selection of this somewhat enigmatic personage [Diem] being apparently inspired by the consideration that he would best be able to ensure American support for a regime faced with the prospect of imminent collapse."

Diem had been destined, by family position and training, for service in the Mandarite, the feudal administrative apparatus that had always governed Vietnam and that the French bent to their own purposes. He belonged to that group of officials who believed in the traditional Vietnamese monarchy and the Mandarin hierarchy that served it. They hoped for eventual independence, but sought the moderate path of reform from within the French colonial hierarchy.

At the time Diem had been part of the French colonial government, other nationalists, including Communists, Trotskyites, and pro-Kuomintang groups, had chosen the path of violent opposition to the French. In the early 1930's the Indochinese Communists, led by Ho Chi Minh, had played the most prominent role in this movement and the "terror" unleashed by the French broke against them. Ho was arrested in Hong Kong and the situation inside Vietnam was disastrous to his cause. As Ellen Hammer described it in *The Struggle for Indochina,*

> The French Legion terrorized north and central Annam. The prisons were filled and thousands were killed. The year 1931 was a time of terror in which perished not only many Communists, but Nationalists and liberals, and many others, innocent victims of French action.

In September of 1933, at the age of 33, Diem abandoned the possibilities of reform from within and left the French administration to go into retirement. But he did not, and never was to, take up active opposition to the French. His decision was determined by a style of political life that he had retained from his Mandarin background. Diem believed in intercession by Providence and his politics were marked by an extreme fatalism. He felt that if one upheld one's personal integrity, remained dedicated, and issued a clear and courageous call to the powers of this world, it would be answered. He had first addressed his call to the French. When that failed, he turned to the Japanese when they occupied Vietnam in 1940. After the war, he tried again with the French, and when that showed little promise, he turned to the Americans.

This last turn came in 1950 when Diem, who was then in Japan, encountered Wesley Fishel, a young assistant professor of political science at the University of California at Los Angeles. In an interview with this author Fishel said that he later persuaded Diem to travel to the United States to plead his case and convinced Michigan State University, to which Fishel had moved, to sponsor the trip. Diem was to spend a considerable part of the next three years in the United States. His brother, Bishop Can, was an important contact with the American Catholic Church, and Diem lived for some time in the Maryknoll Seminaries in New Jersey and New York State. The latter school was under the jurisdiction of Cardinal Spellman, and Diem soon developed a close relationship with this important American Catholic. The Cardinal became one of Diem's most influential backers in the United States and there is no doubt that this support was crucial, for, among other things, it certified Diem as an important anti-Communist—no small matter during the McCarthy period.

Diem was thus launched upon a career as a lobbyist, which was perhaps the most successful role in his political life. He managed to enlist in his cause not only the sympathy of Spellman but also that of liberal and sophisticated political figures who were ordinarily at odds with the conservative prelate.

Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas was one of the first of this group to champion Diem, in his book *North from Malaya,* published in 1952. Douglas had traveled in Vietnam and was convinced that the French could not win against the popular support of the Communist-led Viet Minh. This posed a dilemma for Douglas, which he thought was resolved when he met Diem in Washington upon his return from Vietnam. Diem represented the third force Douglas believed the United States could back: "Ngo Dinh Diem is revered by the Vietnamese because he is honest and independent and stood firm against the French influence." At the same time Douglas admitted that "there is little doubt that in a popularity contest Ho Chi Minh would still lead the field."

Douglas told this author that he arranged a breakfast meeting at which he introduced Diem to Senators Mike Mansfield and John F. Kennedy. Mansfield was to become the Senate's leading authority on Vietnam and as Majority Leader was an important architect of the Kennedy Administration's Vietnam policy some seven years later. During this earlier period, 1951-54, Mansfield and Kennedy became arch-critics of the French role in Vietnam and proponents of an independent nationalist alternative. To them, Diem appeared as that alternative.

In a widely quoted speech delivered in the Senate on April 6, 1954, just prior to the negotiations at Geneva, Senator Kennedy offered a pointed critique of the Eisenhower Vietnam policy. He feared the Republicans might permit a negotiated peace leading to a compromise government in which Ho Chi Minh would be represented. He opposed Ho's participation in the governing of Vietnam, while conceding Ho's popular support: "It should be apparent that the popularity and prevalence of Ho Chi Minh and his following throughout Indochina would cause either partition or a coalition Government to result in eventual domination by the Communists." Kennedy recommended that we force the French to grant independence to Vietnam, form an independent government that excluded the Viet Minh, support that government's army, and "whenever necessary . . . [make] some commitment of our manpower." It was a strong

attack on French colonialism, as Kennedy was also to make in the case of Algeria, but it made no gesture toward self-determination for the Vietnamese. The future President's concern was "for the security of the free world, and for the values and institutions which are held dear in France and throughout the non-Communist world, as well as in the United States."

THE GENEVA ACCORDS

The settlement at Geneva in July, 1954, did three things: 1) it ended the war; 2) it divided Vietnam in half "temporarily"; and 3) it set up an apparatus for "ensuring" the peace and reunification of the country. The basic agreement was drawn up and signed by the representatives of the Viet Minh and the French, the real contestants in Vietnam. The most specific provisions concerned the disengagement of the rival armies and their withdrawal into two "regrouping" zones. The agreement prohibited "reinforcements in the form of all types of arms, munitions and other war materiel" and specified that "the establishment of new military bases is prohibited throughout Viet-Nam territory."

The most important and yet the vaguest parts of the agreement were the political ones in Article 14. The problem of temporary division of the country, interim rule by the belligerents (Viet Minh and French), and subsequent reunification through elections were all described, too succinctly, in a section of Article 14:

> Pending the general elections which will bring about the unification of Viet-Nam, the conduct of civil administration in each regrouping zone shall be in the hands of the party whose forces are to be regrouped there in virtue of the present Agreement.

Two other important political provisions were stated in Sections c and d of Article 14:

> c. Each party undertakes to refrain from any reprisals or discrimination against persons or organizations on account of their activities during the hostilities and to guarantee their democratic liberties.
>
> d. ...any civilians residing in a district controlled by one party who wish to go and live in the zone assigned to the other party shall be permitted and helped to do so by the authorities in that district.

This last section, which covered a 300-day period, was the basis of the refugee migration that was to play an important dramatic role in the formulation of U.S. policy.

Much has been written about the signing or non-signing of the Geneva Accords; some writers have gone so far as to suggest that the Accords were never signed and hence do not exist. It is true that the basic agreement ("Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet-Nam") was signed only by the representatives of the French and the Viet Minh. They did so because they were, in fact, the belligerents or, as Section a of Article 14 specifies, the parties "whose forces are to be regrouped," and it was these "forces" which were expected to administer the two areas during the interim period and to enforce the other provisions of the agreement. The French were to provide the real governmental power in their area (as they had for the preceding eighty years) until the elections were held; they were the only *de facto* "government" other than the Viet Minh, and when these two forces signed the agreement, the fighting stopped.

The basic agreement was then "noted" by the full nine-nation meeting in Geneva. The conference routinely recorded its approval of most of the clauses of the basic agreement but chose to amplify the meaning of the basic political settlement. Since this paragraph has been so often mangled in "interpretations," it is worth recording here:

> The Conference declares that, so far as Viet-Nam is concerned, the settlement of political problems, effected on the basis of respect for the principles of independence, unity and territorial integrity, shall permit the Viet-Namese people to enjoy the fundamental freedoms, guaranteed by democratic institutions established as a result of free general elections by secret ballot. In order to ensure that sufficient progress in the restoration of peace has been made,

and that all the necessary conditions obtain for the free expression of the national will, general elections shall be held in July 1956, under the supervision of an international commission composed of representatives of the Member States of the International Supervisory Commission, referred to in the agreement on the cessation of hostilities. Consultations will be held on this subject between the competent representative authorities of the two zones from 20 July 1955 onwards.

This "Declaration of Geneva Conference" was issued in the name of the conference and approved by eight of the nine nations. In a separate statement the United States declared:

The Government of the United States being resolved to devote its efforts to the strengthening of peace in accordance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations takes note of the agreements concluded at Geneva...[and] it would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern . . . we shall continue to seek to achieve unity through free elections supervised by the United Nations . . . the United States reiterates its traditional position that peoples are entitled to determine their own future....

The United States and the Diem government were later to claim that they were not bound by the agreement because they had not signed it. However, the United States, for its part, had implied approval when it returned Walter Bedell Smith to the conference, from which he had earlier been withdrawn, at the insistence of the English and the French. Eisenhower acknowledged in his *Mandate for Change:* "Our direct interest in these negotiations arose out of the assumption that the United States would be expected to act as one of the guarantors of whatever agreement should be achieved." He also wrote: "By and large, the settlement obtained by the French Union at Geneva in 1954 was the best it could get under the circumstances."

In any event, the French had signed an agreement with the Viet Minh wherein the latter exchanged a favorable military situation for one in which it could pursue its goals through elections—the culmination of ten years of bloody fighting. Three days after the French and Viet Minh signed their agreement at

Geneva, John Foster Dulles entered a demurrer on the part of the United States. He seemed to accept the military solution while rejecting the political implications. At a news conference on July 23, 1954, Dulles said:

The Geneva negotiations reflected the military developments in Indochina. After nearly eight years of war the forces of the French Union had lost control of nearly one-half of Viet-Nam, their hold on the balance was precarious, and the French people did not desire to prolong the war. . . . Since this was so, and since the United States itself was neither a belligerent in Indochina nor subject to compulsions which applied to others, we did not become a party to the conference results. We merely noted them and said that, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, we would not seek by force to overthrow the settlement. . . . The important thing for now is not to mourn the past but to seize the future opportunity to prevent the loss in northern Viet-Nam from leading to the extension of Communism throughout Southeast Asia. . . . One lesson is that resistance to Communism needs popular support, and this in turn means that the people should feel that they are defending their own national institutions. . . .

This recognition of the pragmatic value of freedom—"resistance to Communism needs popular support"—was to become a keystone of U.S. policy in Vietnam. The French colonial puppet regime must be replaced by a "new," "independent" regime, which could then set about to win the support of people who now backed the Viet Minh. Dulles stated that the new government would be protected by collective security arrangements under the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) "to promote the security of the free peoples . . . [against] Communist subversion. . . ." If 80 per cent of the people supported Ho, as Eisenhower was to state later in his memoirs, the threat to the Diem government would presumably come from the people themselves, and free world support of the Diem government would mean frustrating the popular will. But, as the U.S. view had it, the people chose Ho because they had not yet been offered a better way. The U.S.-supported Diem government would become the alternative.

The opinion of the French at the time of Geneva (and that of most Western experts) was that the Accords would simply delay the eventual Viet Minh victory, since Ho's forces would surely win the elections scheduled for July, 1956. The French knew that they were finished in Vietnam and they were attempting to salvage as much economic and political influence as possible. It was toward this end that they were willing to cooperate with the Viet Minh in carrying out the provisions of the Geneva Accords. Thus, the initial stages of the agreement were successfully completed. The fighting stopped, the armies regrouped on either side of the 17th parallel, and refugees were permitted to migrate.

In these first months the French were still the dominant Western power. But as they began the process of withdrawal, the United States moved into the vacuum. American money had paid the costs of the French war effort, and American money would pay the costs of the new Diem government emerging in the South. Although the French would continue to have legal responsibility for carrying out political provisions of the Accords, including the critical matter of elections, the real authority was *de facto* assumed by the United States. This was to confront the United States with a basic issue: if it honored the inherited French agreement it probably would not be able to maintain the anti-Communist stance implicit in its own announced Asiatic policy. This was a question Dulles had left unanswered.

THE U.S. 'ADOPTS' DIEM

The installation of Diem as the Premier of Vietnam helped focus U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. Diem was committed to the re-making of Vietnamese society according to a not always lucid, but always anti-Communist and anti-French, model that required for its enactment the concentration of total power in

the hands of a small trusted group. According to Bernard Fall, in *The Two Vietnams,* Diem, unlike some of his advisers, never had any doubts about the necessity for tight central control to divert the nationalist revolution from Communist objectives. Ho and Giap, the Communist leaders of the Viet Minh, were heroes of the resistance to the French. Diem understood that changing the course of their revolution required the liquidation of the Viet Minh and the "re-education" of the majority of the population that supported the movement. It was a formidable task for a regime that had arisen late in the day and by grace of a foreign power.

Diem in his first year in office moved to consolidate his control by crushing all sources of opposition—the religious sects and nationalist but anti-Diem politicians, along with the cadres left behind by the Viet Minh. These came to be called the Viet Cong. It was soon clear that Diem would refuse to provide for the popular mandate called for in the Geneva agreements. Each step to that end required American support and conflicted with the interests of the French, who wanted to limit Diem's power, keep the situation fluid, and maintain whatever influence they could.

Eisenhower was sympathetic to the French position, as his later writings make clear. He recognized not only Ho's popularity but the high cost of any effort to crush his movement. He resisted grandiose schemes for building up Diem's regime as a Western-style alternative to the Viet Minh, and the man he chose as his Special Ambassador to Vietnam, General Lawton Collins, shared these sentiments. But the Eisenhower Administration was particularly vulnerable to political pressure, and it was during this unsettled period that Diem's pre-Geneva lobbying began to bear fruit.

One of the first voices raised publicly on behalf of a "hard line" of all-out support for Diem was that of Cardinal Spellman. In a speech before the American Legion Convention on August 31, 1954, he was quoted by *The New York Times:*

> If Geneva and what was agreed upon there means anything at all, it means . . . Taps for the buried hopes of freedom in Southeast Asia!

Taps for the newly betrayed millions of Indochinese who must now learn the awful facts of slavery from their eager Communist masters! Now the devilish techniques of brainwashing, forced confessions and rigged trials have a new locale for their exercise.

Spellman emphasized the essential theses of the cold war containment policy: "... Communism has a world plan and it has been following a carefully set-up time table for the achievement of that plan..." "...the infamies and agonies inflicted upon the hapless victims of Red Russia's bestial tyranny...." A show of strength was required, "...else we shall risk bartering our liberties for lunacies, betraying the sacred trust of our forefathers, becoming serfs and slaves to Red rulers' godless goons." The danger lay in the illusion of peace with the Communists:

"Americans must not be lulled into sleep by indifference nor be beguiled by the prospect of peaceful coexistence with Communists. How can there be peaceful coexistence between two parties if one of them is continually clawing at the throat of the other . . . ? Do you peacefully coexist with men who thus would train the youth of their godless, Red world . . . ?"

The Cardinal demonstrated his support of Diem by going to Vietnam to deliver personally the first check for Catholic Relief Services funds spent in Vietnam. Others of Diem's early supporters followed suit. Wesley Fishel, the Michigan State University professor who had originally induced Diem to come to the United States, turned up in Vietnam as one of his chief advisers, with residence in the presidential palace. Another American inhabitant of the palace was Wolf Ladejinsky, a New Dealer who had stayed on in the Department of Agriculture only to be fired under pressure from Senator Joseph McCarthy for alleged (but never proved) radical connections. Ladejinsky had worked on the Japanese land reform program, and Diem hired him to work on land problems in Vietnam—proof to many American liberals of Diem's commitment to serious social reform.

Another visitor to Diem was Leo Cherne, who had helped to found the Research Institute of America, one of the first of the management-research firms designed to help American corporations cope with the expanding government of the post-1930's. It also supplied its 30,000 business clients with general political information. Cherne was also president of the International Rescue Committee, an organization aimed at helping refugees from communism.

Cherne went to Vietnam in September of 1954 and spent two and a half weeks there, becoming very interested in Diem's potentialities as a democratic, nationalist alternative to the Communists. In a cable he sent back to the subscribers to his Research Institute he reported:

. . . have been talking intimately with American officials here, including Ambassador Heath. Conferred at length yesterday with Vietnam Premier Ngo Dinh Diem . . . success of effort to hold Vietnam from Communists depends on whether all non-Communist Vietnamese can unite for struggle. U.S. Embassy, strongly supporting Diem, views him as key to the whole situation. Political and financial instability . . . unless Vietnamese Government can organize important forces and U.S. continues pouring in substantial help and money.... If free elections held today all agree privately Communists would win . . . situation not hopeless . . . future depends on organizing all resources to resettle refugees, sustain new bankrupt government, give people something to fight for and unite them to resist Communism. . . . West can't afford to lose from now on.

Upon returning to the United States, Cherne sent his second-in-command in the International Rescue Committee, Joseph Buttinger, to set up an office in Vietnam. At this time Buttinger was involved in Socialist politics as an editor of *Dissent* magazine; during the mid-Thirties, under the name of Gustave Richter, he had been the leader of the underground Social Democratic Party in Austria. This had been a bitter experience. His one accomplishment, as he writes about it in his memoirs, *In the Twilight of Socialism,* had been to stop the growth of the Communists.

A year after this book was published, a C.I.A. agent named Edward Lansdale introduced Buttinger to the men around Ngo Dinh Diem, and after some three months in Vietnam Buttinger

believed Diem to be the answer to the Communist revolution. As Buttinger remarked to this author, "He was strong and shrewd and determined to stay in power and would stay in power."

During the late fall of 1954, while Buttinger was in Vietnam, a serious split was developing among Americans concerned with Vietnam. As Cherne's telegram indicated, U.S. missions in Saigon were strongly backing Diem. For example, an abrupt halt was called to the revolt of General Hinh, the head of the Vietnamese army and an officer in the French army as well. When General Collins arrived in mid-November of 1954, as Eisenhower's Special Ambassador, he made it clear that the United States would not pay the army if Diem was overthrown. In a matter of days Hinh was sent out of the country and dismissed as head of the army.

However, from the very beginning Diem displayed that tendency toward autocracy and family rule for which the mass media of the United States would belatedly condemn his administration eight years later. In early 1955, when he moved to crush the religious sects, whose military forces rivaled his power, some influential Americans began to side with the French against him. The most important of these was General Collins, and his view was shared by other American observers. Among them was the newspaper columnist Joseph Alsop, who contended that Diem's base of support was too narrow to rival that of the Viet Minh. (Both men were later to renew their support of Diem after he defeated the sects.)

At this juncture, when it looked as if the United States might dispose of Diem, his reservoir of support, his "lobby," proved decisive. In the ensuing struggle the curious alliance of Lansdale, the C.I.A. agent, Buttinger, the ex-Austrian Socialist, and Cardinal Spellman won the day.

On the official level, Lansdale convinced his Director, Allen Dulles, of Diem's efficiency, and the latter convinced his brother, who, as Secretary of State, talked with the President. The recent book on the C.I.A., *The Invisible Government,* by David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, places the total responsibility for swinging

U.S. support to Diem at this stage on Lansdale, but the private political pressures were important. Buttinger returned from Vietnam excited about Diem but fearful that the United States was not totally committed to him. He turned to the group around the International Rescue Committee, one of the most useful of them being the public relations counsel for the organization, Harold Oram. Oram knew the head of the Catholic Relief Services in Washington and that gentleman introduced Buttinger to Cardinal Spellman. The Cardinal was still an enthusiastic believer in Diem, and Buttinger alerted him to the impending crises in Diem's fortunes.

Spellman sent Buttinger back to Washington to meet with Joseph P. Kennedy and finally, according to Buttinger in an interview with this author, these two powerful men, in a long-distance telephone conversation, decided to whom Buttinger should tell his story. In Washington, Kennedy introduced him to Senator Mike Mansfield and to Kenneth Young of the State Department. John F. Kennedy was in California at the time but Buttinger had a long conversation with his adminstrative assistant.

Meanwhile, Cardinal Spellman had arranged meetings with the editorial board of the New York *Herald Tribune,* the chief editors of *Life* and *Time,* and several editors of *The New York Times.* On January 29, 1955, two days after Buttinger's visit to the *Times,* that paper carried an editorial which closely paralleled Buttinger's arguments on Diem's behalf. Buttinger also elaborated his position in *The Reporter* of January 27, 1955, and *The New Republic* of February 28, 1955.

From the Spring of 1955 on, the U.S. commitment to Diem was complete. This meant that the United States would ignore any French protestations and the Geneva Accords—including the provisions calling for reunification through free elections, which, as even Diem's most ardent supporters conceded, would bring the Communist-oriented Viet Minh to power. A Cardinal, a C.I.A. agent, and an ex-Austrian Socialist seemed to have carried the day against the instincts of a General turned President.

THE FLIGHT TO FREEDOM

One provision of the Geneva Accords, it will be remembered, had specified that during a 300-day period following the signing of the Accords "any civilians . . . who wish to go and live in the zone assigned to the other party shall be permitted and helped to do so. . . ." This led to a great flow of refugees between the Spring of 1954 and the Spring of 1955. The bulk of the movement was from the Viet Minh area in the North to the South and eventually involved close to a million people. (According to Bernard Fall, only about 150,000 refugees went North to the Viet Minh.)

These statistics were interpreted in the United States as a repudiation of Viet Minh rule by the Vietnamese people—a mass flight to freedom. But the interpretation ignored two facts: 1) the number of people going North was held to a small total by order of the Viet Minh, which wanted its sympathizers to remain in the South to prepare for the elections; 2) the bulk of those going South fell into two groups—dependents of the colonial native army (200,000) and Catholics (679,000).

The Catholics were a by-product of the French rule, members of a minority religion who had been brought by Portuguese and French missionaries into a predominantly Buddhist population. The Catholic communities in the North had enjoyed a protected status under the French and they had raised militia units that fought beside the French against the Viet Minh. With the collapse of the French, these communities feared reprisals, or at least grave restrictions on their activities, under the new Viet Minh rule.

One American who did much to blur the distinction between the Catholic minority and the rest of the population in the North was Tom Dooley, a young Navy doctor turned writer, whose book *Deliver Us From Evil* had a great impact on the American public. Dooley had gone to Vietnam as part of the U.S. Navy's program of aid in transporting the refugees to the South. He witnessed the great suffering of an uprooted people. As a Catholic, he was particularly impressed with their religious opposition to communism and the fact that they fled with the physical symbols of that religion in hand:

> . . . recognizing us as friends and not as foes, they hoisted, on a broken spar, their own drenched flag; a flag they had hidden for years . . . their symbol, their emblem, their heraldry . . . a yellow and gold flag displaying the Pope's tiara and the keys of Saint Peter.

Working among the Catholic refugees, Dooley took no account of the fact that 90 per cent of the Vietnamese population would be indifferent to the yellow and gold flag, even in the unlikely event that they understood its symbolism.

To Dooley, even aside from the religious aspect, these people were on the side of the "free world" in opposition to the total evil of communism: ". . . how, outside expanding Russia, do you go about being an Imperialist nowadays?" "Ho Chi Minh has been a Moscow trained puppet from the start." "The Godless cruelties of Communism. . . ." "The Communist bosses would. . . ." "The poisons of Communist hatred. . . ."

The Viet Minh was indicted:

> They preached hatred against the institutions, traditions and customs of colonial Vietnam. Everything "feudal" or "reactionary" was to be destroyed . . . their Christian catechisms were burned and they were burned and they were told that religion is only an opiate.

Dooley combined his anti-communism with a strenuous belief in an American-style economic system as the basis of any country's prosperity and freedom:

> . . . we continually explained to thousands of refugees, as individuals and in groups, that only in a country which permits companies to grow large could such fabulous charity be found. . . . These companies [that sent drugs] . . . responded with the enthusiasm of great corporations in a great country.

With this ideological background, it becomes easier to understand Dooley's rather extensive rewriting of history. No act attributed to the Communists was dismissed as unbelievable or as requiring factual substantiation. All of them fitted the "devil

theory" and were passed on to the millions who read his book, heard his lectures, and saw the film based on *Deliver Us From Evil.*

Dooley's account of the American effort begins not with the $2.6 billion spent in support of the French between 1950-54, but rather with the mission to aid the refugees. "We had come late to Vietnam, but we had come. And we brought not bombs and guns, but help and love."

The 17th parallel that divided the refugees from the free world was "the rim of Hell" with "the demons of Communism stalking outside and now holding the upper half of the country in their strangling grip." Those who fought the "devils" were, by definition, heroes:

> The Vietnam governor of our small area was a patriot by the name of Nguyen Luat. He had been educated in France and chose to return to his own nation of Vietnam. . . . During the war he had fought with the French as an officer.

This "patriot" thus fought on the side of the colonialists against the majority of his countrymen.

It is unfair to treat Dooley's book as history, although it may have served as such for many of its readers. Its significance was to provide a vocabulary of Communist horror that found its way into the speeches of Presidents and was, for many ordinary Americans, their only significant emotional encounter with communism in Asia. According to Dooley, Ho Chi Minh had begun his war against the French in December, 1946, "by disembowelling more than 1,000 native women in Hanoi" who were associated with the French. There had been rumors about this, but no factual evidence is provided in any of the standard accounts of that period. An authoritative refutation is supplied by the French writer, Paul Mus:

> I am today in a position to state and to prove that four-fifths of the stories or reports of awful atrocities inflicted by the Vietnamese on our compatriots in Hanoi, December 19, 1946, are either made up or in error.

Dooley lent highly emotional support to the goals of American foreign policy in Vietnam, but he sharply criticized inefficiency in execution. America proved receptive to this type of criticism and Dooley became a folk hero. In 1960 the Gallup Poll found him to be one of the ten most admired Americans.

Dooley believed in his work and his writing, and was deeply moved, as he said, when President Diem gave him the highest award of his land. It attests to his innocence that he did not know that the choice for the award had been inspired by the C.I.A.'s man in Vietnam, Colonel Edward Lansdale.

On January 25, 1955, *Look* carried an impressive photo-story of the flight of the refugees. The article was by Leo Cherne and it combined a poignant description of the plight of the refugees with a political message. The sub-heading stated the theme: "Battered and shunted about by war, they are too weary to resist the Reds without us." The United States had a responsibility to become involved further in Vietnam because the South is "still free but will fall under Red control if Communists win elections set for July of 1956." And this was the likely event, said Cherne, for "if elections were held today, the overwhelming majority of Vietnamese would vote Communist." But if the South Vietnamese might be indifferent to the Communist menace, others were not:

> Asians are convinced that U.S. prestige and influence in Asia cannot survive another defeat. Europe wants to see whether the Communists will be stopped here or will grow into an irresistible force. . . .

Cherne stated the U.S. predicament: "No more than 18 months remain for us to complete the job of winning over the Vietnamese before they vote. What can we do?"

The answer was for the United States to "mobilize democratic leadership," which could be found among the Catholic refugees. The International Rescue Committee was helping to do this by ferreting out the educated men among the refugees and funneling them into the government administration.

It was later to be charged by many in the United States that Diem's regime floundered on his pro-Catholic prejudice. But

the heavy use of Catholic refugees as administrators was natural, because they were certified opponents of the Viet Minh who also were educated. As Cherne said of the Catholic refugees, "There is an army of 400,000 Vietnamese ready and anxious to convince their countrymen that they must choose freedom." By embracing the refugees, Diem helped maintain his administration in power, but he also planted seeds for the anti-Catholic demonstrations that led to the fall of his government in 1963.

There is no doubt that the movement and resettlement of 900,000 refugees from North to South Vietnam was the most successful program of the Diem administration. It was also the first immediate result of massive American aid, which laid out about $89 for each refugee (in a country with an $85 per year per capita income). The U.S. Seventh Fleet joined the French Navy to move the refugees, and private agencies (Catholic Relief Services, International Rescue Committee, Red Cross, Junior Chamber of Commerce, Michigan State University, etc.) poured in to assist the large numbers of French and American government personnel in Saigon.

Once the refugees had been transported, the paramount task was to see to their permanent well-being by integrating them into the economy. The South was under-populated and this facilitated the provision of land to the refugees. Usually, the refugees had moved as whole villages, with their hierarchies and leadership generally intact. During the first two years of the program, most of these were supported by a U.S. relief program of dollar aid and surplus agricultural food distributed by the Catholic Relief Services. In his book, *The Two Vietnams*, Bernard Fall concluded, "Obviously most of these refugees were then still living from handouts rather than from the fruits of their labor." A good portion of the land cleared for them was in the Cai San project, where 90,000 were settled in an area formerly sparsely populated. This was the showplace for government tours by visitors to Vietnam. The land was cleared by 100 tractors ordered by the United States Operations Mission, which also brought in technicians and representatives of the tractor firms from the United States to train native operators.

The United States supplied the seed for the newly turned fields and the materials for schools and houses.

This was an effective crash program of *American* aid; it had little to do with the ability of the Diem government to develop the economy as a whole. In fact, the refugee program had a negative impact on the Vietnamese not so favored. An essentially "welfare" movement tailored to the needs of a minority group by a minority leader was bound to grate on the non-Catholic majority. The religious problem in Vietnam had some of its roots in this program. In the final analysis, the refugees were *not* integrated into South Vietnamese society.

THE 'LOBBY'

The "flight to freedom" of the refugees provided an important public relations basis for continued U.S. involvement in Vietnam and was used as such by those Americans concerned about Diem's future. The U.S. government had helped Diem over the hurdles posed by the rival sects, the opposition elements, the Viet Minh, and the "non-elections." But if Diem as Chief of State, an office he assumed on October 26, 1955, was to continue to hold off the Viet Minh, he would have to develop a governmental structure, provide political stability, and carry out a program of economic development. All of this would require massive American aid, both economic and technical. The flight of the refugees and the wide publicity given to it in the United States made the American public receptive.

At this point, the various individuals committed to the development of Vietnam as a showcase of democracy began to draw together as an unofficial "Vietnam lobby." The founding of the American Friends of Vietnam in the fall of 1955 provided the "lobby" with a formal organization. This group led the fight on Diem's behalf during the next six years.

The announced purpose of the American Friends of Vietnam was "to extend more broadly a mutual understanding of Vietnamese and American history, cultural customs, and democratic institutions." In actuality, it was concerned with the political objective of committing the United States to a massive aid program on Diem's behalf. In pursuit of that policy, the organization cited the alleged success of the program to date in creating an "economic and political miracle" in Vietnam.

The Friends was primarily an organization of the liberal center. Its founding members as listed on its letterhead included Senators Kennedy and Neuberger, Max Lerner, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Representatives Edna Kelly and Emmanuel Celler, with the Socialist Norman Thomas and the "right wing" Governor J. Bracken Lee. This provided an attractive political balance. Power in the organization resided in a fourteen-member executive committee, some of whose members were also on the board of directors of the International Rescue Committee, including Leo Cherne and Joseph Buttinger. Cardinal Spellman and the Church's program in Vietnam were represented on the board by Monsignor Harnett, head of the Catholic Relief Services.

Two members of the executive committee, Norbert Muhlen and Sol Sanders, were on the staff of *The New Leader,* and the political philosophy of that magazine, militant anti-communism plus sympathy for government-inspired social reform, best summarizes the philosophy of most of the executive committee members. Another member of the executive committee was Elliot Newcomb, who was later to become the treasurer of the organization. Newcomb and Harold Oram, who had introduced Joseph Buttinger to the Catholic officials, were partners in a public relations firm, Newcomb-Oram, which two months before the formation of the American Friends of Vietnam had signed a contract with Diem's government to handle its public relations in the United States. Newcomb subsequently left the firm, but Oram continued to be registered with the Justice Department as a foreign agent acting for the Diem government until June 30, 1961. The Diem government paid the Oram firm a $3,000 monthly fee plus expenses, with a third of it earmarked for a full-time campaign director. This position was held from 1956 to the end of the contract in 1961 by Gilbert Jonas, who had been executive secretary of the American Friends of Vietnam and later became its secretary and assistant treasurer.

Up to this point Vietnam had not been a popular subject for American scholarship or journalism. There were few "experts" on the area in the universities or the press. The vastly expanded American role in the period following the Geneva Accords produced a great demand for knowledge about the country. As a result, those who were most intimately involved in the American program there generally blossomed as the chief sources of information and opinion. This was natural, but most of them were committed protagonists and their writing soon became propaganda for the cause. This was particularly true of university participation. The one group of social scientists most informed about the area was pulled in to work on a U.S.-sponsored program that came to typify American political involvement in Vietnam. This was the group sent out by Michigan State University.

THE MSU PROJECT

In 1955, '56, '57, even '58 President Ngo Dinh Diem and his entire government had a fantastically complete, and almost naive, confidence in Americans, per se.

Especially "on the in" in those days was the Michigan State University Group, paid by the U.S. Government under a contract to "advise" the Vietnamese Government in a number of fields of activity. Among their "advisory" duties was the formation of what is now referred to by "foreign adventurers" and the foreign press as "the secret police of Mr. Ngo Dinh Nhu."

The M.S.U. group proceeded with "training" for several years. The head of the M.S.U. group was considered the most "in" man

among the foreigners and many considered him more "in" than the President's own ministers.

The M.S.U. group enjoyed an extraordinary power based on this confidence. Not only did they "train" but they also "controlled" in large measure the now famous "secret police."

The most "in" man of 1955 referred to in this 1963 editorial from *The Times of Vietnam*, a Diem-controlled paper, was Wesley Fishel, the young professor who had persuaded Diem to come to the United States to line up American support for his cause. Fishel first went to work for the Diem government in 1954 as an "advisor on government reorganization." He was also a member of the personal staff of Special Ambassador Collins and, in Fishel's words to this author, "I was the only contact that he [Collins] had with Diem that was at all effective for many months.... After two years I surfaced—to use a C.I.A. term—to become head of the M.S.U. program."

In addition to Fishel's and Diem's interest the decision to formally associate Michigan State involved higher policy considerations. The National Security Council in the spring of 1955 had decided on continuing all-out U.S. support for Diem. No less a personage than Vice-President Nixon called John Hannah, the President of Michigan State, to elicit his support. Hannah was told, according to Fishel, that Vietnam had been declared top priority and that it was in the national interest for his university to become involved. Officially, the project would be part of the International Cooperation Administration program of assistance to underdeveloped countries. It was in fact the largest operation and would involve 54 professors and 200 Vietnamese assistants. It was also to fill a special need.

The Geneva Accords had prohibited increases in the strength of either side through the introduction of "all types of arms" or build-ups in troop strength. The presence of the International Control Commission (made up of nationals of Canada, Poland, and India) offered the prospect of unfavorable publicity to the United States if its Military Assistance Advisory Group, United States Operations Mission, or C.I.A. agents operated openly. The Michigan group would serve as "cover."

Diem, as a minority figure in his own country, required a strengthened police power. The Diem government had reason to expect an attack from segments of the armed forces hostile to it or from police units under the control of the bandit Binh Xuyen sect. It was for this reason, according to Fishel, that Art Brandstatter, head of the Michigan State University School of Police Administration and ex-Colonel of M.P.s, began training Diem's Palace Guard. As part of this training program, described in M.S.U. monthly reports, the Palace Guard was supplied with guns and ammunition the Michigan State professors obtained from the U.S.-M.A.A.G.

Bao Dai, when he had been Chief of State, had placed the national police and security services under the control of the Binh Xuyen, and they were hostile to the Diem government. By April of 1955, Diem could call upon army troops whose loyalties had been ensured by Ambassador Collins' statement that the United States would only meet the payroll of an army committed to the Diem government. These were employed to crush the Binh Xuyen. The Michigan State professors decided to concentrate their energies on the reconstitution of the police apparatus. Their monthly report for July, 1955, stated:

It has been generally agreed and the Ambassador has specifically asked that we concentrate almost exclusively on the police and field administration projects until the elections of next July.... It is now felt by the MSU team that in order to be in accord with U.S. policy locally it is necessary to engage almost exclusively in immediate impact programs until after the elections in July, 1956 and that the immediate impact programs in our program are the field administration and the police projects.

By November, 1955, the professors were able to state in their monthly report:

During the month of October we received a notice of Washington's approval of the recommended expanded police program submitted August 29th. We started immediately to implement this program. Conferences were held at USOM on October 10th and the Embassy on October 23rd and 24th, trying to coordinate Internal Security operations in Vietnam, in which our government has an interest.

With Washington's sanction, the professors reorganized the old French-sponsored Sureté into a new "Vietnamese Bureau of Investigation," which was modeled upon the FBI but would "also be responsible for the many other enforcement duties that are peculiar to this part of the world, such as information and postal control, etc." The police force was turned into a paramilitary unit, trained in particular to deal with uprisings on the part of the citizenry. Once Saigon was secured, it became essential to pacify the countryside, and so the Civil Guard, a rural-based militia of 40,000 men, was organized. The immigration authorities were trained to fingerprint the Chinese population, which was distrusted by the Diem government, and all agencies of government were trained in maintaining security dossiers. The monthly records of the project list a wide variety of guns, ammunition, vehicles, grenades, handcuffs, and teargas equipment that the Michigan State team passed on from "official U.S. agencies" to their Vietnamese protégés. From 1955 to 1960, the Michigan team had the major responsibility for training, equipping, and financing the police apparatus for Diem's state.

The M.S.U. team, of course, had other responsibilities for building a governmental structure. The professors worked on the constitution, redesigned parts of the bureaucracy, developed a school of public administration and the beginnings of a civil service. In their attempts to gear the government to a solution of the serious social problems confronting it, the M.S.U. project published many studies. They were couched in the jargon of public administration and were aimed at increasing the efficiency of Diem's operations. These documents never mentioned the facts of the dictatorship under which the Diem family consistently stood in the way of the reforms suggested. The M.S.U. team constructed a beautiful paper government that never was translated into reality.

The failure of the M.S.U. project may have resulted in part from that "in-ness" to which *The Times of Vietnam* referred. President Hannah was an important Republican figure and had been an Assistant Secretary of Defense. Interviews with some

members of the project revealed that involvement in a high priority government program gave them a heady feeling of glamour and prestige. As one member frankly states, "I saw the job in Vietnam primarily from the standpoint of my own career development. I had taught public administration and I saw this as a job with experience, with an entreé back into the academic world."

The project favored a technical approach to social problems. This "scientific style" provided a justification for academics functioning in a strange land as controlled agents of their government and permitted them to perform tasks that would otherwise have run contrary to the personal ethics of many of them. The interviews this author had with various members of the M.S.U. team revealed a strong sensitivity to the titles, positions, awards, and other attentions of the institutions with which they had contact. Later, their attitudes were to range from the rather cynical view of one project head who stated: "Knock it out of your head that 99 per cent of university guys are educators—they are all operators," to those who became tormented by the moral implications of their work in Vietnam. In this category was one economist who thought that the academic program of the Diem government was an almost total failure and concluded that the peasants might have been better off with the other side. But although he was to write about Vietnam, he did not express such thoughts, and his reasons for not doing so were described as follows:

> If you are an ordinary person you will be listened to insofar as it sounds right. Otherwise you're considered a deviant. Only if you have high status will a deviant be listened to. . . . I suppose people would most likely figure that I was a crackpot who lacks good judgment—not cashiered for this but always a question mark—wouldn't say you're subversive—but would influence their judgment about my judgment.

If they were reticent while in Vietnam, some of the professors became highly prolific on paper after their return to the United States at the end of their tours of duty. Much of our public

expertise on Vietnam has come from alumni of the M.S.U. project; they are the authors of many of the articles about Vietnam not only in scholarly journals but in the mass media. In this writing, they have concerned themselves with the many social and political problems facing Vietnam, but nowhere have they engaged in a critical analysis of the M.S.U. project itself. They had played a vital role in building the governmental apparatus for the Diem administration, but much of their work was irrelevant and self-defeating, and many of them came to feel that a good part of it was, in an old-fashioned sense, immoral.

'THE MIRACLE OF VIETNAM'

In 1957, after three years in power, Diem traveled to the United States for an official visit. By then he had crushed the rival power of religious sects and opposition politicians and had won the commitment of the United States to finance his regime and supply it with a large force of Americans to implement the aid program.

It was during this trip that the celebration of the "Miracle of Vietnam" began in earnest. Diem was "handled" by the Oram public relations firm and the American Friends of Vietnam. He received the red-carpet treatment in official circles and in the press. He was flown in on President Eisenhower's personal plane, the "Columbine," and the President met him at the airport. According to the account in *The New York Times* of May 9, 1957,

> In salvaging South Vietnam from the disorder that threatened its existence after partition in 1955 and by establishing democratic forms, President Diem has carved a deep niche in official esteem in Washington.
>
> This was evident in the character of the welcome. During the last four years, President Eisenhower has met only one other foreign leader, King Saud of Saudi Arabia, on arrival.

Diem addressed a joint session of Congress and then journeyed to New York City. He breakfasted with Cardinal Spellman and, as *The New York Times* of May 13, 1957, reported, he occupied a place of honor at St. Patrick's Cathedral, where Bishop Flannery sermonized: "The entire world acclaimed him when this God-fearing anti-Communist and courageous statesman saved Vietnam." Mayor Wagner, in welcoming Diem to the city, described him as a man "to whom freedom is the very breath of life itself," "a man history may yet adjudge as one of the great figures of the Twentieth Century," and defined the government he headed as a "political miracle."

The social highlight of Diem's trip came at a dinner in New York, jointly sponsored by the American Friends of Vietnam and the International Rescue Committee, at which Henry R. Luce presided. Angier Biddle Duke presented Diem with the Richard E. Byrd Award for "inspired leadership in the cause of the free world." President Eisenhower sent a message commemorating the Award, which stated: "In the tradition of a great explorer, Byrd, the Premier of Vietnam [by] his inspiring leadership in the cause of the free world is opening up vast areas for the peaceful progress of mankind." Perhaps the most candid comment of the whole trip was the one made by Diem himself in accepting the award: "Your aid enables us to hold this crucial spot and to hold it at less expense to you and at less danger to the world than you could have done it yourself."

During his stay in the United States, many of the speeches that Diem delivered were written for him by Joseph Buttinger. *The New York Times* of May 12, 1957, noted in an editorial, entitled "Diem on Democracy," that he "has added a strongly spiritual, rather than political note in his definition" of democracy and that

> this could have been expected from a man of deep religious heart. It is also not surprising that a firm concept of human rights should come from a man of erudition. . . . With such a declaration, we believe, Thomas Jefferson would have no quarrel. . . . This is straight talk from a courageous man. It is welcome here and it should be

heard in some other quarters. There is no "neutralism" on human rights, and this is the basis for President Diem's stand.

Life in the May 13, 1957, issue was more reserved in its celebration of Diem's democratic spirit than the *Times*. In a layout entitled "The Tough Miracle Man of Vietnam," the magazine adhered to the "miracle" line, but admitted that it was accompanied by some toughness:

Behind a facade of photographs, flags and slogans there is a grim structure of decrees, "re-education centers," secret police. Presidential "Ordinance No. 6" signed and issued by Diem in January, 1956, provides that "individuals considered dangerous to national defense and common security may be confined on executive order" in a "concentration camp.". . . Only known or suspected Communists who have threatened or violated public security since July, 1954 are supposed to be arrested and "re-educated" under these decrees. But many non-Communists have also been detained. . . . The whole machinery of security has been used to discourage active opposition of any kind from any source.

Nevertheless, *Life* expressed enthusiasm:

Ngo Dinh Diem is respected in Vietnam today for the miracles he has wrought. . . . To a world daunted by the idea that circumstances are bigger than men, one man with a purpose is demonstrating what he calls "the power of the human personality."

Diem had "miraculously" overcome one apparently insurmountable obstacle after another. His most significant "hurdle," according to *Life*, "was the famous Geneva election":

. . . He knew that it was not a question of who could win the projected plebescite: it was a question of who the people would expect to win, and all too many of them would have hedged by voting on the assumption that the Vietminh might win. *Diem saved his people from this agonizing prospect* simply by refusing to permit the plebescite and thereby he avoided national suicide. [Italics added]

As time went on, the descriptions of Diem's "miracle" became more sophisticated and the "miracle" itself more encompassing. The Americans most actively involved in Diem's program came

to be the most important propagandists for it in American journals; *viz*, Wolf Ladejinsky, writing in the December 24, 1959, issue of *The Reporter:*

When, on the anniversary of Vietnam's independence, I asked Pres. Ngo about his role in it, he replied that he was but an instrument of the invisible hand of the Lord. Whether he led the country single-handed or in close cooperation with divine Providence, there is much about his five years in office that is almost incredible.

Ladejinsky recognized that democracy was less than perfect under Diem—"He believes in democracy, but he is compelled to ration it"—but such restrictions were necessary to provide political stability and economic improvement in the face of the Communist menace:

The overwhelming majority of the people in South Vietnam are not affected by the regime's authoritarianism. They have probably never enjoyed greater freedom in the conduct of their life and work or benefited in a greater variety of ways. Impatience with the government on the part of those intellectuals who want power for the asking doesn't extend to the peasantry.

This account of the peasants' desires was offered as authoritative, since the author was employed by the Diem government from the beginning as chief foreign adviser on agrarian problems. It served to provide a justification for the Diem regime more acceptable to *The Reporter's* liberal readers than the image provided by *Life* of Diem's saving "his people" from the "agonizing prospect" of elections.

So, too, the article by Wesley Fishel, the head of the Michigan State University project, in *The New Leader* of November 2, 1959, "Vietnam's Democratic One-Man Rule":

Ngo Dinh Diem has all the authority and all the power one needs to operate a dictatorship but he isn't operating one! Here is a leader who speaks the language of democracy, who holds the power of a dictator, and who governs a Republic in accordance with the terms of a Constitution . . . written at his request by a National Assembly which he caused to be elected by the people of the Republic.

Having absolved Diem of the specific charge, however, Fishel went on to expound an ideological position under which dictatorship in any underdeveloped country can be justified:

In Vietnam, as in other new states of Asia . . . independence could not have been achieved and cannot be maintained, under prevailing world conditions, without strong leadership. And strong leadership implies the possession of great power. As Sebastian Chamfort remarked to Marmontel, who was deploring the excesses of the French Revolution: "Do you suppose, then, that revolutions are made with rose water?". . . . The peoples of Southeast Asia are not, generally speaking, sufficiently sophisticated to understand what we mean by democracy and how they can exercise and protect their own political rights. . . . The unlettered majority . . . are far more interested in the more immediate and tangible issues of securing and guarding their independence, increasing their standard of living and developing their country.

The important questions became what sort of revolution Diem was making and why it required the stringency that his regime was exerting. These questions had been hinted at earlier in an article Fishel wrote for the Autumn, 1959, *Yale Review,* in which he predicted the political future with notable inaccuracy:

On October 26, 1959, South Vietnam will celebrate its fourth anniversary as the Republic of Vietnam. The anticipated elections of 1956 have never been held, and the Communist capability in Vietnam, south of the 17th Parallel, has been reduced to one of sheer nuisance activity. . . . It is one Asian area where Communism has been rolled back, and rolled back without war.

The major accomplishment of the Diem regime, then, was that it had stopped the Communists from controlling all of Vietnam; and an apparatus of force was required for that purpose. Fishel thought the task to have been completed: "There is little likelihood of a revolution against the regime," he wrote in the *Yale Review* article. And in *The New Leader* article: "His [Diem's] regime now is assuredly one of the most stable and honest on the periphery of Asia."

In still another area, Fishel's predictions were refuted by subsequent events. He noted that some observers of Vietnam had pointed to Diem's Catholicism and feared that this would cause political and social friction, but Fishel felt this to be an irrelevant projection of Western views: "Religious issues are often important in European and American politics," but not in Vietnam.

In November, 1959, the American Friends of Vietnam sponsored a conference devoted to the theme of South Vietnam's progress. Fishel reported: "I can testify that there has been measurable progress toward responsibility and freedom"; and Wolf Ladejinsky added, in *News From Vietnam,* November, 1959:

In his efforts to deal with rural problems, President Diem and his government have not resorted to force, setting up class against class, or to any of the methods used by the Communists to impose their brand of agrarianism. Social peace has been maintained throughout.

None of this suggests that the press of the United States would not have hailed the Vietnam "miracle" without the efforts of the lobby. There was the usual tendency to follow the official line and believe the best of the man whom *Time* in its November 21, 1960, issue described as "doughty little Diem" and whom it had chosen as "the father of his country . . . without him the whole nation would have fallen to the communist Viet Minh." In *Newsweek* for June 29, 1959, Ernest K. Lindley was convinced that South Vietnam "has had more striking progress in more ways than any other nation I have visited so far" and that Diem was "one of the ablest free Asian leaders."

The lobby's main effort was to provide an ideological framework to explain away the uncomfortable facts that occasionally found their way into the mass media as "a necessary reaction to the Communist menace" confronting Diem. The "miracle" thesis formulated by the lobby was accepted by most of the mass media during the first five years of Diem's regime. It was generally accepted that aid to Vietnam had produced a success story: the Diem government had turned back the threat of communism by initiating vast programs of economic and

political reform and greatly improving the lives of the people. American aid and advice had helped to develop a "nationalist alternative" to the Viet Minh and the country was making rapid strides toward political stability and economic independence.

Between 1954 and 1958 Diem's government did attain a degree of stable rule over parts of South Vietnam. But it is clear now that it was not evolving toward a free society. Indeed, the essential condition of its stability was the absence of political freedom. From the very beginning the Diem regime showed no reluctance to utilize political terror to strengthen and maintain its rule. During this period the United States set out to ensure the loyalty of the army to Diem, as the Michigan State professors had done in the course of training the secret police and the Palace Guard. Colonel Lansdale of the C.I.A. also was concerned with winning over the peasants and toward that end organized Civic Action teams which roamed the countryside with megaphones and film projectors extolling the virtues of the Diem regime. The M.S.U. group later took over this project, but it was able to report only limited success. It was difficult to recruit members for the teams and they were forced to rely heavily on refugees from the North loyal to Diem. As John D. Montgomery reported in his book, *The Politics of Foreign Aid*,

> . . . The villagers who were the project's beneficiaries sometimes resented the visiting teams because they were staffed with refugees from the north—strangers who spoke a different dialect and practiced a different religion. Almost all refugees from the Communist regime in North Viet-Nam were Roman Catholics, and the government's costly program for them, together with the policy of using such strong anti-Communists as Civic Action leaders, stimulated much envy and resentment.

The Diem government's contribution to the idea of civic action was to unleash a reign of terror upon the countryside. There were massive anti-Communist renunciation campaigns. Thousands of people suspected of sympathizing with the Viet Minh were sent to re-education centers. Those thought to be active Viet Cong agents were jailed or shot. Prizes were offered for

turning in one's parents or relatives, and detailed statistics were compiled on the number who confessed and were re-educated.

Article 14c of the Geneva Accords had protected the rights of those sympathetic to the belligerents in the war, but the Diem government did not permit the International Control Commission to investigate charges of violation of these provisions. It was the view of the Commission that because of the obstruction of the Diem government, "The Commission is therefore no longer able to supervise the implementation of this article by the Government of the Republic of South Vietnam."

The Accords embodied concepts ostensibly cherished by the "free world," and it was these provisions the Diem government refused to uphold. For example, the Sixth Interim Report of the International Control Commission reported that the Viet Minh offered "to have complete freedom of movement between the two zones" making an "iron" or "bamboo" curtain impossible, but the forces in the South rejected this. During the summer of 1955, demonstrations in Saigon against the Geneva Accords had resulted in the burning of the hotel that housed the Control Commission.

The Viet Minh, on the other hand, was more respectful of the Accords because they were counting on the Commission's carrying out the elections. The Sixth Interim Report of the unanimous finding of the Commission stated: ". . . the degree of co-operation given by the two parties has not been the same. While the Commission has experienced difficulties in North Vietnam, the major part of its difficulties has arisen in South Vietnam."

These reports indicate that the apparent political stability of the Diem regime in those first five years was due primarily to the Viet Minh willingness to withhold pressure in view of its virtually certain victory at the polls under the Geneva Accords. This is conceded in the account of that period offered in the U.S. State Department's White Paper of October, 1961:

> It was the Communists' calculation that nationwide elections scheduled in the accords for 1956 would turn all of Viet-Nam over to them. . . . The primary focus of the Communists' activity during

the post-Geneva period was on political action . . . the refusal [to hold elections] came as a sharp disappointment to Hanoi, whose political program for two years had been aimed at precisely that goal. The failure of 1956 was a severe blow to the morale of the Viet Cong organization in the South. . . . The period of 1956-58 was one of rebuilding and reorganization for the Viet Cong.

By 1959, the Viet Minh had finally written off the possibility of elections and turned to military means. Thus ended the illusory stability of the Diem regime.

THE LAND REFORM PROGRAM

The division in South Vietnam between the Catholic refugees and the rest of the population was widened by the agrarian reform program on behalf of the refugees, but it was upon the success of this program that the hope of an economic "miracle" for the country depended. To the refugees arriving as strangers from the North, the agrarian program was a boon. It settled them on abandoned land and provided a subsistence living and necessary seed and implements until they could be self-sufficient. Although there was some chaffing at the insistence of the Diem government on retaining ownership of the lands, the program represented an obvious net gain for the refugees.

There was nothing comparable for the indigenous population. Although the Viet Minh had always taxed the peasants to support the war against the French, it had provided them with tangible benefits in return. Its coming led to the disappearance of the landlords, and the peasants were urged to seize the land they had tilled for others. But peasant support for the Viet Minh was based on a good deal more than a mere accounting of immediate interests.

Joseph Alsop was one of the few Westerners to tour rural South Vietnam while it was still occupied by the Viet Minh. In an article for *The New Yorker* (June 25, 1955) he recounted:

I would like to be able to report—I had hoped to be able to report—that on that long, slow canal trip to Vinh Binh (Mekong Delta) I saw all the signs of misery and oppression that have made my visits to East Germany like nightmare journeys to 1984. But it was not so.

At first it was difficult for me, as it is for any Westerner, to conceive of a Communist government's genuinely "serving the people." I could hardly imagine a Communist government that was also a popular government and almost a democratic government. But this is just the sort of government the palm-hut state actually was while the struggle with the French continued. The Vietminh could not possibly have carried on the resistance for one year, let alone nine years, without the people's strong, united support.

Diem had few illusions about the loyalty of the rural populace and was content with a program of pacification rather than of winning support. His American advisers, however, recognized the inherent weakness of such a state of affairs. They felt that some positive support for the Diem government had to be added to that given by refugees if communism in South Vietnam was to be contained. An axiom of American foreign policy is that an exploited and impoverished peasantry provides fertile soil for communism, as in China; therefore, intelligent land reform, preserving private property and simultaneously creating a new middle class of farmers, is a necessity for "free world" objectives. In President Eisenhower's note to Diem soon after he became Premier, he called for "indispensable reforms," which implied agrarian reform. But the Diem government, Robert Scigliano wrote in *South Vietnam: Nation Under Stress,* only began to work in earnest on this program after Eisenhower's appointee, Ambassador Collins, "reportedly stipulated effective agrarian reform as a condition of the increased American aid which President Diem was seeking."

By 1959, the resulting land reform was being acclaimed in the United States as the single most important achievement of the Diem administration. Its provisions, on paper, were suited to the goal of creating a rural middle class. Contracts were designed between landlord and tenant to fix maximum rents and guaranteed a period of tenure for at least five years.

A later ordinance specified that all holdings in rice land exceeding 100 hectares (about 247 acres) would be purchased by the government from the landlords. Ten per cent of the purchase price was to be paid in cash and the balance in non-transferable government bonds bearing 3 per cent interest and redeemable in twelve years. The purchased land was then to be resold to the tenants at the same price, to be paid by them to the government.

The huge rubber plantations (mostly French-owned) were left intact under a provision excluding all crops but rice. This was because of their efficiency; unlike many of the larger rice operations they had continued even under the Viet Minh. In addition, rubber provided an important source of foreign exchange.

United States counterpart funds paid the salaries of the 700 administrative personnel working on the agrarian reform program. The cost of the land transfer program was estimated at $68.6 million, but only $6.4 million was required in the first stage. The U.S. government, hesitant about allocating money for the "expropriation" of private property, provided $4,000,414 for "administrative" expenses. It did, however, provide for a $3,000,000 increase in "highway maintenance" funds which was then transferred by the Vietnamese government to land purchase. These outlays and the 80 per cent of South Vietnamese budget supplied by U.S. funds meant that the operation was totally dependent upon U.S. sponsorship.

The tenants ended up paying a higher rate than the amount specified by the law, but this, according to Wolf Ladejinsky, represented an improvement over the pre-war rate. In fact, in "Agrarian Reform in Vietnam," published in *Problems in Freedom,* edited by Wesley Fishel, Ladejinsky went even further: "Perhaps the real significance of these measures is that they represent the first breach in the traditional view of landlordism as the basis of wealth, political power and social prestige." The U.S. State Department asserted that the very success of the program inspired the renewal of Communist aggression.

There is no doubt that the land reform program was related to the renewal of guerrilla warfare—an irony since American insistence on the program was based on a belief that such policies would forestall support for the guerrillas rather than inspire it. But the policy, whatever its merits on paper, was a stop-gap measure after the fact. The rule of the Viet Minh in the South preceding Geneva had meant the flight of the landlord and the seizure of land by the tenant. This made the later Diem land reform act seem like a measure that took from the peasants rather than gave to them. This point is admitted by the two Americans most enthusiastic about and most intimately involved in the land reform program, J. Price Gittinger and Wolf Ladejinsky. In *Far Eastern Survey,* January and February, 1960, Gittinger wrote:

> As implementation began in early 1955, an interesting paradox in landlord and tenant attitudes emerged. Much of Free Viet-Nam had either recently been recovered from Communist control, or Viet-Minh forces still retained paramount influence. In these areas, particularly those in south Viet-Nam, landlords had sometimes not collected rent for as long as eight years. Therefore, landlords looked upon the contract program as a means to assure them a rental of at least 25 percent of the crop. On the other hand tenants in these areas resisted the program, since they had been paying no rent at all.

In "Agrarian Reform in Vietnam" in the Fishel book, Ladejinsky wrote:

> Many a tenant had not paid rent in years, and thus even the admittedly low rent of 15 to 25 percent appeared to be an imposition. Others whose occupation of land had been sanctioned by the Communists believed that their ownership had already been confirmed, and that signing a contract now would invalidate their claim to ownership.

The most politically effective response on the part of the government would have been to legalize take-overs that had occurred under the Communists. But this solution would have struck at the basic respect for property underlying the type of rural middle-class society that the United States and the Diem

government were attempting to create. John Montgomery in *The Politics of Foreign Aid* described the Vietnamese government as "not wishing to disturb the strong landowning classes." The program reaffirmed the sacredness of property and at the same time enhanced the landlords' financial position. According to Montgomery,

> It was true that the landlords opposed the low rentals, but it was equally true that their experiences in the past decade had had a sobering effect. They were interested in selling their land.

The receipt of 10 per cent in cash and the rest in bonds redeemable in twelve years from a government underwritten by the United States was an appealing reward for land that had been written off as lost.

In its actual operation, land reform legitimized the return of the landlord to the countryside he had fled, to collect rents he had ceased to collect, and to receive money for land he had long abandoned. This is the link between the land reform program and the increase in guerrilla warfare. Observers Scigliano, Montgomery, Ladejinsky, and many journalists agreed that peasant dissatisfaction with land reform was a breeding ground for the growth of Communist power in South Vietnam.

THE U.S. AID PROGRAM

From 1955 to 1962, the U.S. supplied the Vietnamese with more than $2 billion in aid. Of this amount, $1.4 billion was intended for economic assistance. According to the "miracle" thesis Vietnam was the brightest spot in the foreign aid program: in other countries such aid might be wasted on corrupt and reactionary leaders, but in Vietnam it was being used to start the country on the path toward economic development. It had, to use Leo Cherne's phrase, left the "entire economy

reinvigorated by Ngo's skillful, tenacious and vigorous government." The introduction of more than $2 billion dollars into a country with an annual gross national product of $1.2 billion could hardly fail to be invigorating, but permanent economic development is a more elusive goal.

The bulk of the aid was in the form of counterpart funds to pay for the excess of imports over exports. In 1958 South Vietnam imported $232 million worth of goods and exported only $55 million. U.S. dollars paid for 85 per cent of the imports. In 1959 the United States paid for 75 per cent of the imports; in 1960, for 84 per cent. If the United States had not supplied this dollar aid, the goods could only have been imported by drawing on the gold and foreign exchange reserves of the South Vietnamese government or by increasing exports. The economy never developed sufficiently to permit the latter; and since total gold and foreign exchange reserves of the Vietnamese government in 1958 amounted to $159 million, drawing on this could only have been possible for one year. Thanks to the largesse of the American aid program, these reserves were increased by $57 million between 1958 and 1960.

The U.S. aid program permitted the South Vietnamese to consume an amount of foreign goods (15 to 20 per cent of the GNP) in excess of what its economy could afford. Since these goods were imported by private dealers in response to private demand, a false prosperity resulted, particularly in Saigon, which did not reflect the state of the economy as a whole. But, as John Montgomery writes, an important element of the program was "... to find a political instrument for generating support for the Diem regime. A plentiful supply of consumer goods would provide the middle class (army officers, civil servants and small professional people) with goods they wanted and could afford to buy."

But army officers, civil servants, and the small professionals who serviced their needs were only in a position to buy goods because of other aspects of the U.S. aid program. Saigon importers paid in South Vietnamese piasters for goods originally bought with U.S. dollars. These piasters were then turned over

ness of a democratic society. Millions of people, including President Eisenhower, accepted what was in essence an irrelevant critique. For Col. Hillindale was said to have been patterned after the real life Col. Lansdale, who had been one of the men most responsible for getting the United States involved in Vietnam. The model for the hero of *The Ugly American* had helped shape the very program the book derided.

The tarnishing of Diem's "image" in the United States was accompanied by signs of serious disintegration in Vietnam itself. Diem was aware of what this sort of discontent might mean in estranging the United States. He knew that his government could not survive if the massive aid program were cut off. And he concluded he would have to base his appeal on the issue of anti-communism. This emphasis had been made clear when Diem and Chiang Kai-shek, exchanging visits, chose the occasion of Diem's visit to Formosa, on January 29, 1960, to issue the following joint statement, as reported in *The New York Times* of January 30:

> . . . It is the earnest hope of the two Chiefs of State that the temporary lull existing in the European scene will not lure the Free World off its guard, particularly in the Far East and Southeast Asia, where threat of aggression persists as long as the Chinese mainland remains under the yoke of International Communism. The aid received by the free Asian countries on the periphery of or in the path of aggression from the Communist bloc should therefore not be reduced, but should be further strengthened so as to enable them to meet effectively both the overt and covert Communist action.

Earlier, the Diem regime had played down the Communist threat. Its boast was that it had restored security to the countryside. But now, with the "Communist danger" the basis for assuring continued American aid, the "secure" countryside suddenly was overrun with "Communist terrorists."

This shift in the official line created some confusion. In June of 1959, for example, Senator Mansfield at a Senate committee meeting had quoted the statement of Major General Myers, formerly Deputy Chief of the U.S. Mission in Vietnam, that the Viet Cong in the South were ". . . gradually nibbled away

until they ceased to be a major menace to the government. In fact, estimates at the time of my departure indicated that there was a very limited number of hostile individuals under arms in the country. Two territorial regiments, reinforced occasionally by one or two regular army regiments, were able to cope with their depredations."

This statement had been made on April 17, 1959, and U.S. Ambassador Dubrow attested to its accuracy as late as June, 1959. It was soon to be contradicted by reports such as the one in *The New York Times* of October 31, 1959: "A top-level Vietnamese source said today that the two-week-long campaign [in the southernmost province] had resulted in the killing of about 300 Communists and the capture of 400. He said an additional 700 had surrendered and an undetermined number had been wounded."

In an attempt to explain such discrepancies, Diem's officials, during 1960, began to expound the theory of continual Communist aggression from the North. It was said that Communist agents from the North terrorized the villagers into joining their cause and that whole companies of well-armed invaders were arriving in the South, having traveled over the "Ho Chi Minh Trail." This was to become the basis, during the Kennedy Administration, for greater U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and for bombing raids across the border under President Johnson. But there is little evidence from the critical period 1959-60 to support such a contention.

Observations that ran counter to the official line were provided by a RAND Corporation researcher, George K. Tanham, who traveled in South Vietnam during 1960 in an effort to evaluate the guerrilla fighting that had developed. In his 1961 book, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare,* he reported:

> The so-called Ho Chi Minh trail is no more than a series of paths that run north and south through the mountains and are not suitable for large arms shipments. . . . To judge by equipment and arms that have been captured from the Communists, they have been fighting largely with home-made weapons and with such material of French and American make as they have been able to steal or capture.

Tanham concluded his book with the following paragraph:

> However, the crucial fact today is that the Communists are arousing the people to fight and work for them. It is easy but wrong to attribute their success solely to terrorist methods. They are systematically creating the "sea" that Mao thought essential for military success and eventual political control. Diem has been unable to win popular support either on a nationalist basis or with personal loyalty as a motivating force. Until his government has the active and continuing support of the Vietnamese masses and the troops, all the economic and military aid in the world, though it may delay it, will not halt the Communist advance.

An account of this period was also provided by Philippe Devillers, a French writer on Vietnamese history, in an article in the *China Quarterly* for January-March, 1962. Devillers argued that the Communists in the South entered the fight against Diem reluctantly, not on orders from Hanoi or Peking but in response to the terror campaign that Diem had conducted against former members of the Viet Minh in the countryside from the time he first assumed power in 1954. "The insurrection," Devillers wrote, "existed before the Communists decided to take part, and they were simply forced to join in. And even among the Communists the initiative did not originate in Hanoi, but from the grassroots, where the people were literally driven to take up arms in self-defense."

Devillers has been one of the most consistently accurate commentators on Vietnamese affairs, but this thesis has barely entered public discussion in the United States on Vietnam policy. Edgar Snow did incorporate much of Devillers' argument in the chapter on Vietnam in his book, *The Other Side of the River,* as did Oliver E. Clubb, Jr. in *The United States and the Sino-Soviet Bloc in Southeast Asia,* but they have been minority voices, largely unheeded.

At the end of April, 1960, eighteen Vietnamese nobles, including a number of former ministers, petitioned Diem to liberalize his regime. According to *The New York Times* of April 29, "The petition said continual arrests had filled prisons to overflowing and asserted that a swollen Government bureaucracy was corrupt and inefficient." The petitioners were conservative men, well-known for their strong anti-communism and past ties with the French administration. It was striking that they felt called upon to warn Diem publicly that his policies would soon give rise to "soaring waves of hatred and resentment of a terribly suffering people standing up to break the chains that restrain them."

Then, on November 21, 1960, Diem's worst crisis in this period came when his elite paratroopers rose in revolt. Thousands of civilians joined with them and marched on Diem's palace, but in the end, after 400 lay dead, Diem remained in power. This event broke through the complacency of the American press. *Newsweek* for November 21, 1960, warned: "The revolt has been crushed, but it remained a grim signal to Diem of the extent of opposition to his authoritarian regime." *Life* for November 28, 1960, reported: "Diem was in more trouble than ever. He was once a national hero. Now, thanks to his increasingly high-handed policies his best units could no longer be relied on...." *Time* for November 21, 1960, quoted a paratrooper captain who had joined the "revolt": "All Diem has done in six years in office is indulge in nepotism. He has generals who don't even command a company. He lives in an ivory tower surrounded by his family...." And *Time* added: "Pleading the Communist threat, Diem has ruled with rigged elections, a muzzled press, and political re-education camps that now hold 30,000. His prosperous key advisers are four brothers and a pretty sister-in-law."

These events, which occurred during the last months of the Eisenhower Administration, began to build pressure for a re-evaluation of U.S. policy. There were indications of increasing disenchantment in Washington with the attempt to create a showcase of American aid in Vietnam. What is more, key members of the "Vietnam lobby" were also becoming disillusioned with Diem. Joseph Buttinger had gone to work with Vietnam exiles in the United States preparing for Diem's overthrow. As early as February, 1960, Leo Cherne had gone to Vietnam at the behest of many leaders of the American Friends

of Vietnam to ask Diem to change his ways. The Michigan State University project ended in 1961, and Wesley Fishel, its innovator, was no longer on close terms with Diem.

THE KENNEDY POLICIES

John F. Kennedy took office in January, 1961. Vietnam had been one of his early concerns and it occupied a high place among the international problems he now had to confront.

As a result of the book on the C.I.A., *The Invisible Government,* many Americans are aware of the role played by the C.I.A. and its chief agent in Vietnam, Edward Lansdale, in involving the United States in Vietnam at the time of the Geneva settlement in 1954. It seems to have gone unnoticed, however, that Lansdale played an equally important role during the first year of the Kennedy Administration in committing the United States to a far deeper involvement in that country. In January of 1961 Lansdale, by then a Major General, was sent to Vietnam by Secretary of Defense Gates to prepare an over-all study of the situation. He reported that the situation was near total collapse and that if the policies of the Diem government and its advisers continued to be pursued the country would soon be lost. However, if Lansdale's recommendations were followed, the situation could be saved. The report caused a stir in the Kennedy Administration. The President called Lansdale to congratulate him and to suggest that a portion of the report be published in the *Saturday Evening Post* (as it was in the May 20, 1961 issue).

In May, 1961, Kennedy asked Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric to set up a special task force under General Lansdale to begin shaping the new policies of the United States toward Vietnam. The group hammered out a basic agreement after about three weeks of strenuous argument. There were varied views as to the extent and nature of the new U.S. commitment.

According to General Lansdale, in an interview with the author, the discussion became emotionally charged, and comments such as "People are getting killed out there," or "You're a traitor," or "You want to kill a lot of Vietnamese?" were typical. But for all of this intensity of opinion it does not seem that anyone suggested, as had the French and General Eisenhower some years before, that the root of the problem may have lain in the popular support of the Viet Cong. It was not that the men on the committee gainsayed Ho's popularity. On the contrary, their major criticism of the effort in Vietnam concerned the inability of the Diem government to arouse popular support through social reform. But they looked upon this as a factor that was negotiable.

It had always been Lansdale's belief that the Communists were "outselling" us, and that through proper social programs, combined with an imaginative propaganda program, the United States could outsell *them.* As he noted as recently as October, 1964, in an article in *Foreign Affairs,* "The Vietnamese need a cause and we have not supplied it."

The political member of the committee was Sterling Cottrel, a State Department career officer, who was to head the task force after its initial three weeks under Lansdale, when the Pentagon turned over the prerogatives of leadership to the State Department. Cottrel was sympathetic to the "hard" position. He had recently returned from serving as Admiral Felt's political officer in the Pacific fleet. He held that the United States must continue to support Diem despite his failings: "I argued that this was an Oriental dictator and you couldn't change the spots on the tiger. . . ."

Cottrel was particularly irked at those who said that the war could not be won if Diem continued to rule, including such members of the old Vietnam lobby as Fishel and Buttinger. Like other hard-headed professionals, Cottrel did not consider Diem that important. What the professionals were concerned about was an extension of U.S. influence and the better use of U.S. expertise and equipment. As Cottrel stated in a conversation with this writer,

Others wanted to have Diem delegate authority—a lot of our Michigan State people who had been out there had said this was an administrative nightmare—Fishel was for letting Diem rot at the end of '61—we started getting this noise, this yak, when we first started supporting Diem—they said it wouldn't work because of Diem—so I argued, hell—the provincial chiefs have to be friends of Diem but let us work with provincial chiefs whom Diem trusts—we can bypass hierarchy, ministers, ship stuff right to the provincial chiefs—get the show on the road—we wrapped the stuff up and sent it to the provinces—we were able to bypass Diem.

One indication that the style of operation had changed was the transfer of the Government of Vietnam's public relations account from the Oram group to the much larger advertising firm of Kastor, Hilton, Chesley, Clifford and Atherton in May of 1961. It became a much more costly account involving about $200,000 a year. This proved to be a strictly commercial operation devoid of the political doubts and confusions of the earlier group.

The task force also decided to increase the number of U.S. advisers and to change the nature of their duties. The first group of 100, trained in the Army's Special Forces program, went to Vietnam in May of 1961. It was also decided to increase the size of the Vietnamese Army from 150,000 to 250,000 (in violation of the Geneva Accords limit of 150,000) and to concentrate its training on counter-insurgency. A similar program was intended for the civil guard. There was also some planning for social reforms to mobilize peasant support. This was a variation of the "New Villages" concept that had been used by the British in Malaya, and the expert on that project, Robert Thompson, was induced to go to Vietnam.

When the task force felt the need of academic advice in July of 1961, it did not turn to the old group of professors who had helped create the "miracle" and were now disenchanted with it, but rather to an outsider, Eugene Staley, of the Stanford Research Institute. Cottrel described the process of selection:

. . . We agreed to send out the best economist we could collect to look at their economy to assess how the resources could best be utilized

to this end. I had a list of economists and when we decided on Staley I went to Bowles [Chester Bowles, then Under-Secretary of State] and asked him if he would call Staley on the President's behalf—easier for Bowles to put on pressure than the President. Before Staley went out I took him to the White House to meet the President—then he sailed off and came back with the report—then we started pushing the stuff out, the hardware.

It seems to have been Staley's job to report on the economic feasibility as well as the costs of the program. His inch-thick and still secret report reinforced the suggestions of the task force. According to a "leak," *Time* for August 4, 1961, stated: "Overall, the report would commit the U.S. to the most detailed program of economic and social reform that the U.S. has ever undertaken." It called for an immediate increase of 20,000 in the armed forces, guerrilla training, and approved the idea of strategic hamlets or "New Villages" as economically feasible units. *Time* reported further:

Diem completed 27 agrovilles last year, but reaped nothing but antagonism when overzealous Diem men yanked peasants away from their fields just at harvest time, put them to work at forced labor to build the new agrovilles. To compound the peasants' anger, it frequently turned out that there wasn't enough room for them in the agrovilles that they had been forced to build. But Staley concluded that the basic idea was good, hopes the U.S. will finance the construction of at least another 100 in the next twelve months.

Time may have given too much credit to Staley for his sponsorship of the strategic hamlet program. His report was concerned with the technical economic aspects of the program, such as the cost of barbed wire. Cottrel recalls that the President was enthusiastic about the strategic hamlet idea, having always believed that one should learn from the experience of other countries—in this case the British in Malaya. Lansdale, on the other hand, opposed them. When asked about them by this writer, Lansdale replied:

I don't believe in police measures—genocide, transmigration of villages, curfews, use of force—must allow the development of govern-

by a government committed to increasing the efficiency of that economy and providing equal opportunity for its citizens to enjoy its fruits.

There is considerable dispute and confusion about the specifics of this politics, but at the core are "big" or organizing theories about the structure of society that are as much an "ideology" as is found in its Communist rival. And, like the Communists, we think our "big" ideas to be universally applicable.

It is sometimes claimed that ours is a commitment to peaceful change and theirs a commitment to violent revolution. But it should be obvious by now that ideologies that are in power will always be concerned for peace and respect for the rules they have created, while ideologies out of power must stress the opposite. This was the case in Vietnam: first the French were dominant, and the Communists out of power were interested in violating the rules that assured French domination. By 1954, the Communists had won, and at Geneva they were able to write a new set of rules. But the United States, interested in reasserting its ideology, broke those rules and succeeded in establishing Diem in power. At that point the rebel reappeared, this time in the form of the Viet Cong.

In my examination of the American mass media for this report I found no instance where a "Communist" could be described as altruistic or genuinely committed to the well-being of his fellow-man. If individual Communists appeared to be so, it was because they were being deceptive or were themselves deceived by higher-ups who better fitted our image of the Communist. The idea that Communist or Viet Minh rule under Ho Chi Minh might be better for the Vietnamese than any alternative political system has never been really examined in the United States because it is unthinkable. And although it was often admitted that a good portion of the Vietnamese population seemed to have this idea (Eisenhower thought it might be 80 per cent), it has never been seriously suggested that this view is worthy of any respect by Americans. Rather, it has been attributed to the ignorance of the peasants and the effectiveness

of Viet Cong propaganda or their terror tactics or to the thesis that the Vietnamese do not understand the true and inevitable nature of communism and that Americans, who do, have the responsibility of containing communism wherever it might spread.

One of the problems in the over-protection of ideology is that it tends to become flabby or meaningless. The consensus that obtained in the United States during the cold war years, aided by the systematic purging from American life of all those suspected of harboring sympathies toward communism, has suffered from not being seriously challenged internally. Big ideas, as well as little ones, lose their vitality when they are not systematically challenged—a truth acknowledged by Mao Tse-tung as well as by John Stuart Mill.

With over-protection, a soft rot sets in that erodes what is best in the dominant ideas. The idea of aiding defenseless people against aggression is noble, but if it degenerates into stopping a people from having the system they want in the name of preserving their freedom it is a "betrayal of the revolution," be it the American or the Russian. The idea of American professors using American goods in a program of economic development to help a hungry people remain free is noble, but the activities of the Michigan State University team in passing shotguns to the secret police represents a degeneration of that ideal.

Throughout the past ten years, many specific criticisms of U.S. policy in Vietnam have been voiced in the mass media—some implicit and some direct—but almost all of them have been quibbles in relation to the basic policy. Many facts that should have been uncomfortable for that policy were presented—facts about Diem's terror, Viet Cong popularity, and so on—but they failed to produce a real political issue because they were not linked together to provide a confrontation with the "big idea" behind the policy. The end of ideological controversy, in this area of foreign policy, meant the end of serious dialogue. It was because the dominant idea did not meet with such a confrontation, even though it was wrong, that it went on from one absurdity to another, each based on erroneous assumptions about

fundamental reappraisal of U.S. policy post-Diem, but it was not forthcoming. The article began with the statement: "The war in South Vietnam cannot be won . . ." because of "the attitude of the people toward their government and national leader." Rose went on to chastise American policy-makers for not grasping "the importance of the people":

> While forever raising wet fingers to the wind of public opinion in the U.S., the policy-makers appear to operate on the belief that Asian people have no opinions, and even if they did have an opinion, it would carry no weight . . . it only takes one government-oriented peasant to inform on the movements of the Viet Cong, one peasant actively supporting the government. . . . Incredible though it is, that one active individual is lacking in most areas of the Mekong Delta, the economic heart of South Vietnam. . . . Today the grass-roots strength of the Viet Cong appears so strong, particularly in the Delta, that it seems unlikely any leader could shake it.

However, despite the free world's professed commitment to self-determination, Rose did not raise the basic question: should Communists, with wide popular support, be allowed to lead the country? Rose dealt with Asian opinion only in terms of military significance: lack of popular support made winning the war impossible. He concluded that the United States cannot win, "but we do not necessarily have to lose." He urged negotiations, "and I do not mean General de Gaulle's conference table. Within the foreseeable future, reunification of the North and South could only result in a final Communist victory. But there are other possibilities."

Rose outlined the significance of the Sino-Soviet dispute, the moderating and independent role played by Ho, and the inclination of the North Vietnamese leaders to Yugoslav-type independence. But despite all this, he accepted the containment policy, and supported the overriding necessity for stopping the spread of communism in Vietnam:

> To sum up: one solution now for the U.S. appears to be a show of power in South Vietnam which would pave the way toward a compromising settlement. But is the risk of a power-play warranted?

Southeast Asia has been likened to "a set of dominos." If South Vietnam falls, the rest of the blocks go, too. It would seem,therefore, that it is in the high interest of the U.S., as a leader and a system of government, to risk much in stabilizing that tottering block.

The critics in the press limited themselves to the inefficiency of the U.S. program rather than evaluating its assumptions and goals. Although they reported specific pieces of information that seemed to undercut the U.S. position, these were not presented in a pattern that could lead to any confrontation of basic policy questions. There was evidence to indicate that the "aggression from the North"—the professed basis for American involvement—was not a significant element of the guerrilla fighting. This had to mean, then, that the United States was in the position of opposing a largely indigenous and popular movement, as had been first suggested by Philippe Devillers. But to allow the facts to fall into a pattern that would force such a conclusion would deny some of the myths used to sustain U.S. policy at home. The press showed no disposition to challenge simplistic anti-Communist ideology, although it was an ideology increasingly unrelated to the actual events, and increasingly unable to handle or explain them.

CONCLUSION

It has become fashionable to discuss the end of ideology as an accomplished fact of American life. However, on the basis of U.S. experience in Vietnam, it would be more accurate to conclude that there has been an end to ideological controversy rather than to ideology itself.

The Vietnam story underscores the total commitment of dominant American political and press circles to the ideology of modern welfare capitalism. The cold war years seem to have reinforced a consensus in America about the politics of the good life—a politics based on a private economy regulated and primed

But, while Warner conceded that "inevitably, the American image has suffered from its close association with his [Diem's] repressive family," no moral chickens came home to the American roost. He concludes: "The gallant and in many ways for some time successful American effort to help the Vietnamese people save themselves from Communism has been all but destroyed."

In comparison with *The Reporter, Time* appears almost a hotbed of criticism. *Time* passed on the official line but also printed factual information that occasionally undercut the U.S. position. Its cover story in the August 4, 1961, issue seems explicitly intended as a rallying call for full U.S. backing of Diem:

> South Vietnam has been U.S. sponsored from the start; its government is militantly anti-Communist and its soldiers are willing to fight. If the U.S. cannot or will not save South Vietnam from the Communist assault, no Asian nation can ever again feel safe in putting its faith in the U.S.—and the fall of Southeast Asia would only be a matter of time.

But at another point in the same article:

> . . . The greatest worry was the peasantry. After all the years of struggle, Diem had still not won the farmers to the government side. Fully one-fourth of the villages were in the hands of the Communist guerrillas, and often this was more voluntary than forced. The fact was that hundreds of thousands of South Vietnamese, naive and illiterate, thought of the rebels not as Communists but as resistants continuing the nationalist battle first started against the French. To these peasants, "Uncle" Ho Chi Minh is still a hero, and under the influence of Viet Cong propaganda they have become convinced that the U.S. has simply replaced the French as their overlords.

After reporting this, *Time* concludes: "But the lesson of Laos and the new urgency of the U.S. administration seem to have changed him [Diem]. Every recommendation in the Staley report has already received his concurrence in advance."

Four months after this optimistic report on Diem's reforms, *Time* of December 8, 1961, carried this contradictory note:

> He [Diem] angrily refused to go along with the suggested domestic reforms. Yet the reforms called for are relatively modest and include a liberalization of Diem's harsh, one man government, which has already disenchanted most of the nation's educated class and caused mass resignation of top officials, often in protest against arbitrary arrest . . . [and] a widespread implementation of land reform to win back the invaluable support of the Vietnamese peasants, who are now either pro-Communist or indifferent to both sides.

One exceptional voice of dissent came from *The New York Times,* whose approach by this time had altered. Its reporter, David Halberstam, became the most celebrated "critic" of State Department policy in Vietnam. His articles earned him a Pulitzer Prize and are credited by some with having turned the U.S. against Diem and thereby caused his downfall.

Halberstam's basic contention was that the war was being lost when the State Department said it was being won, and that it was being lost because of the aloofness, brutality, and inefficiency of the Diem government. Unless the United States faced up to this reality and made Diem reform, or replaced him, Halberstam indicated, it would lose the war. This was criticism that attempted to make the American anti-Communist policy more efficient without challenging its basis—criticism that assumed that the U.S. ideology did offer something better, and the only obstacle was Diem. Later, Halberstam was to make his point of view clear in an interview with George J. W. Goodman in *Esquire,* January, 1964, after Diem's fall:

> Until the Vietnamese government commands the loyalty of its people, there will be an uneasy stalemate between our military superiority and the Communists' political effectiveness. With that stalemate, we can't win, we can only not lose. What worries me—and what the Viet Cong is counting on—is that we may get worn down and fatigued, and go to Geneva to agree on a face-saving coalition. And then this pretty little country will be lost.

Similarly, when Jerry Rose, who reported expertly on Vietnam for *Time* and the *Saturday Evening Post,* turned up in *The New Republic* of October 12, 1963, one might have expected some

the guns that had killed the villagers.] . . . But that night the Vietnamese army's 105-mm howitzers sent 20 shells blindly, arbitrarily, crashing into mountains where the living villagers had moved with their dead.

Between 1961 and 1963 *The Reporter* magazine published a series of articles by Denis Warner. In his first piece in the August 17, 1961, issue Warner placed blame for the lack of progress in Vietnam on Communist disruption. He held that a liberal government could not have been more effective in stopping the Communists, and that the Diem government was not as repressive as had been reported. One of the attacks on Diem had centered around his Law 10-59, but Warner wrote: "Nor does an examination of the even more bitterly criticized Law 10-59, establishing special military tribunals to deal summarily with Communist acts of insurgency and treason, reveal the excesses of which it [Diem's regime] has been so often accused."

According to Warner's count, in the first year of the law's operation, of 131 individuals brought to trial by these courts, twenty-seven were sentenced to death, fifty to life imprisonment, and only seven acquitted.

By the following year, in *The Reporter* for September 13, 1962, Warner found the situation improved: "I have come across more evidence of the right things being done in the right way than at any period in the past thirteen years in this war-torn part of the world." There were still some mistakes, and he recounted cases of water torture by Diem's soldiers that he had witnessed:

> Without exception, the prisoners were bound with their arms behind their back and beaten, punched or kicked. Three soldiers would then seize each man and force him under water. From time to time, his head would be dragged out of the water for questioning. . . . This usually went on for ten to fifteen minutes, sometimes for much longer. The final act was to force the man's mouth open while another soldier poured water down his throat. . . . When he could hold no more, he was thrust under again, this time with a hand clasped over his mouth.

Warner considered that this "was all pointless" and inefficient because the interrogators did not bother to act on the information obtained.

The argument of Warner's first two articles in 1961 and 1962 was that U.S. backing of Diem was valid. His concern over mistakes was that it "aids those who think in terms of a coup and, even more dangerously, those who are misled by the Communist call for peace."

But by October 10, 1963, when Warner wrote his third annual review for *The Reporter*, the U.S. government was thinking openly in terms of a coup, and Diem had come to be the source of all error and failure in Vietnam. The U.S. position in Vietnam began to fall apart as the Buddhists rose in revolt against Diem. As the *National Review* pointed out at the time, and as the United Nations report on Diem's treatment of the Buddhists corroborates, the government was not being unusually oppressive towards the Buddhists at the time of the rioting in Hue. It was merely acting in a manner consistent with its general alienation, mistrust, and hostility to the bulk of the population. But when the Rev. Quan Duc set fire to himself in protest, the public relations fog shrouding Vietnam also burned away. When Diem took steps to crush the Buddhists with his police force, he finally ceased to be negotiable as a free world commodity.

The change required some interesting gyrations in the press. Readers of Denis Warner in the October 10, 1963, issue of *The Reporter* now learned that "Nhu directed South Vietnam like a gangland leader." Previously Warner had thought reports of legal harassment exaggerated, but now the Diem government had made "an attempt to frame me," charging that Warner wrote propaganda for the Buddhists.

Now Warner could report:

> "Land reform, so widely acclaimed was, in fact, a ghastly flop. Far too conservative in character, it was soon completely discredited. . . . All the pretense has been abandoned now, and it is permissible even to question whether the war was ever going as well as the American admirals and generals would have us believe."

the village had made very effective use of the large number of CARE "Settler Kits" and other private aid that had come to the village from Americans who had seen the movie based on Lansdale's article. Father Hoa was using the 148 Viet Cong guerrillas whom his troops had captured to work under guard in the village's rice field, and, as Schenche stated, "For two hours after work they 'study' and hear lectures on 'the true nature of Communism' and on freedom and democracy."

Several months later, in its issue of November 24, 1962, the *Post* reported that our huge investment in weapons, equipment, and know-how was finally beginning to pay off: "Since last spring [the South Viet army] ... managed to hunt down and kill some 13,000 Viet Cong and capture 6,000 more." As in most American reports, the presumption was that since the Viet Cong was Communist it could not be motivated by any concern for the peasants:

> ... The enemy ... from Ho Chi Minh's training schools in Communist North Vietnam is no different in appearance from the peasant in the South. ... He lives, sleeps, and eats among the people he has sworn to subvert, either holding their allegiance through propaganda or enforcing it by terror.

Defined in this way, the Viet Cong became objects to be studied, and the photographs that appeared in the American press of Viet Cong captives bound and about to be tortured were not especially shocking. In the November 24, 1962, *Post* two of Diem's soldiers hold up a young girl, looking frightened and sullen, her hands bound in front of her, so that the American photographer could get a better shot.

The *Post* article also reported on the strategic hamlets: "It's the old stockade idea our ancestors used against the Indians." "The first seeds of democracy are being planted." The fact that the peasants were continuing to resist the hamlets was explained in the customary terms:

> Here then is the government's dilemma. It cannot hunt down and kill the Viet Cong until it has gained the loyalty, the trust and the full support of the people, for only the people can tell the government who the Communists are, and where they are, and what they are up to. But the government cannot persuade the people of its good intentions towards them until it can safely send into the villages its working propagandists ... to carry to the rural hinterlands the political, social, and economic reforms so desperately needed there. And it cannot carry out these programs until the Viet Cong are killed or driven out.

Another source of optimism for the *Post's* analyst was the work of the U.S. Army Special Forces in organizing the Montagnard tribesmen, who live a Stone Age existence in central Vietnam. Aspirin tablets and medicines to cure their itches and fevers proved the key to winning them over. The program was successful in convincing them to kill the Viet Cong and protect the Americans: "They are joyfully ambushing the Viet Cong on the jungle trails and hunting them down in their mountain hideouts."

The leader of the pro-American Montagnards in the training camp visited by the *Post* reporter was a young French-speaking Montagnard named Liut Till. But he turned out to be a Viet Cong agent, and one night he led a good number of his fellow-trainees, all of whom had been carefully screened by the Americans, to revolt. Faced with the revolt, the American advisers banded together around a group of the camp's heavy guns and, without a single Montagnard coming to their aid, fought off the attack, inflicting a great number of deaths. The following from Jerry Rose's March 23, 1963, article in the *Post* describes day-to-day involvement of Americans in Vietnam:

> The Montagnards, meanwhile, gathered at dusk outside the gate of Plei Mrong to pick up their sons and husbands and fathers who were killed that morning ... there was an old woman who apparently recognized her son beneath a blanket ... two men lifted the body on a bamboo pole. They began to carry it off, with the old woman following behind. ... Many bodies were picked up on poles and carried away, until there was a long line of the living and the dead moving into the deepening dusk of the mountainous jungle. ...
>
> "I'm sure sorry the villagers got so hacked," said Mike Boyd quietly. [Mike Boyd was one of the American soldiers who had fired

ments of some popular will—you don't put the people you're fighting for in a cage of some sort—I don't believe in that—if these folks would voluntarily want to go in a strategic hamlet, and there have been some—go to people and explain the benefits—this certainly wasn't the case in Vietnam, they were told to do things and moved around, the penalties for not doing were severe—areas outside strategic hamlets were combat areas—I think this was deep distrust of the people.

The strategic hamlet program was incorporated into the overall operations and grew to be the major vehicle for whatever social reforms the United States had in mind for isolating the guerrillas from the people.

Later, in October, 1961, an omnibus task force—the Taylor Mission—went to Vietnam and directed the earlier segments of the program into two main channels. U.S. military equipment and expertise would be used in a counter-insurgency program that would be made more efficient than before by by-passing the Diem bureaucracy with thousands of American advisers working with combat units. The second part of the program was a recognition that the Viet Cong was fighting a guerrilla war that depended upon peasant sympathy. The peasants therefore had to be separated from the guerrillas through "clear and hold" operations. This involved clearing out the guerrillas and moving the peasants into fortified hamlets, surrounded by barbed wire or bamboo spears, and guarded by local troops.

This program departed from Lansdale's idea of winning the peasants over first and then arming them. It assumed the indifference or hostility of the peasants, but attributed it to Viet Cong "terror" or Diem's policies. It was reasoned that if the peasants were given the security of the strategic hamlets, though initially it might be against their will, they would eventually come to support the Diem government. In the meantime, the Viet Cong would have lost its source of men and food.

In October, 1961, the Administration offered justification of its increased participation in Vietnam in the White Paper entitled "A Threat to the Peace; North Vietnam's Effort to Conquer South Vietnam." To quote Dean Rusk's introduction,

the Paper set out to expose "the determined and ruthless campaign of propaganda, infiltration, and subversion by the Communist regime in North Vietnam to destroy the Republic of Vietnam. . . ." The permanent division of the territory into two independent countries was accepted as a fact, despite the Geneva Accords, as was the refusal of elections.

The White Paper conceded that the bulk of the Viet Cong guerrillas were South Vietnamese peasants living in their native villages and supporting themselves by tilling their native soil, but this is explained by reference to Viet Cong terrorism:

> Undoubtedly there are some volunteers. But the record shows that many young Vietnamese are dragooned into service with the Viet Cong. Some are kidnapped; others are threatened; still others join to prevent their families from being harried.

A statement by Under-Secretary George Ball amplified this thesis:

> The guerrillas whom the Vietnamese Army is fighting are under distinct handicaps. In many cases they are poorly trained and equipped and not motivated by deep convictions. Rather they are merely unsophisticated villagers or peasants who have been conscripted by terror or treachery. In such case they are likely to have had only rudimentary training in weapons handling and tactics. Their equipment may be makeshift, often just what they can capture or fabricate themselves. . . . Only the leaders and the hardcore have a strong ideological commitment. The rank and file are their puppets . . . those whom they have bought, coerced, or intimidated.

It is difficult for government officials of any persuasion to recognize good in an enemy, but this attitude left only an awkward explanation for the successful course of the Viet Cong fight. The United States seemed to be arguing that coercion alone could intimidate peasants into fighting fanatically with fabricated weapons against vastly superior forces. Yet the Diem government had been attempting to intimidate them for six years without any success at all in enlisting their support.

The source of the Viet Cong's weapons did make the State Department uncomfortable, as the White Paper indicated:

The weapons of the Viet Cong are largely French, or U.S. made, or handmade on primitive forges in the jungles. . . . The Communists have avoided any large-scale introduction of Soviet-bloc arms into South Vietnam for this would be too clear evidence of their direct involvement.

If the arms were largely captured ones, and the guerrillas mostly native recruits, what was being infiltrated? The evidence of the White Paper shows that several thousand trained and dedicated Communists who had gone South with the Viet Minh in 1954 had gone back to the North for training and were now being smuggled back into the South. The State Department did not answer the Viet Minh argument that these men had no other option since the West had blocked peaceful means of change by election left open by the Geneva Accords. Nor did it address itself to the implicit question of how these thousands were able to succeed against the better armed 300,000 troops of the government.

THE PRESS AND VIETNAM

By the spring of 1961, when the United States undertook its new program for Vietnam, the magazine press began to revise its picture of Diem's "miracle." The rationale of stepped-up U.S. action was the state of near-collapse of Diem's government. Since the "miracle" had included the restoration of political stability, it was necessary to explain why the Communists controlled a large part of the countryside.

An article in the April 9, 1961, *New York Times Magazine* by Leo Cherne afforded a convenient bridge between the old "miracle" theory, of which the *Times* and Cherne had been leading exponents, and the new "realistic" view. Cherne recognized that all was not well in Vietnam, but attributed this state of affairs to the Communists:

. . . President Ngo was as emphatic in his commitment to democratic ideals during my recent conversations with him as he was when I first met him. His deepest conviction and proudest boast is that he has used these last seven years since his nation was born to prepare his people for democratic institutions. [However,] the unhappy lot of a long-suffering people remains violence, subversion and death. These are the bitter consequences of unyielding Communist efforts to obliterate seven years of work, growth and freedom.

An article in the July 2, 1961, issue of the *Times Magazine* by Robert Trumbull, the *Times'* chief correspondent for Southeast Asia, affirmed the need for American aid to Diem, but also affirmed the continuing popularity of the Viet Cong:

. . . It has been difficult for the Army to obtain the cooperation of the villagers in fighting the Viet Cong.

By assiduous effort, the Reds have succeeded to a significant extent in creating a favorable image of themselves in the countryside. The Government line is that the peasants generally despise the Viet Cong because of its cruelties, and assist the insurgents only when they are forced to do so. It doesn't take much inquiry in the provinces to discover that while there is a considerable amount of truth in what the Saigon spokesmen say, there is also a great deal of support for the Communists among the peasants.

As to the charge of aggression from the North, Trumbull wrote:

Some qualified observers seriously doubt the validity of a general impression that the Viet Cong is heavily supplied from Communist-ruled North Vietnam. There has been considerable evidence that the Communists have not found this necessary on any major scale.

Cherne had written in *The New York Times Magazine* for April 9, 1961, that the "agrovilles . . . are the most fruitful pioneering rural ventures since the Israeli cooperative farm, the Kibbutz." But in Trumbull's account: ". . . the agrovilles have encountered such stiff, and unexpected, opposition from the peasants who were affected in one way or another that the program has been temporarily suspended."

Trumbull offered suggestions to aid the government in attaining its objective—to drive out the Viet Cong:

The answer suggested by numerous qualified observers on the spot . . . who, unfortunately, may not have the ear of President Diem . . . is an intensive program of public relations along with improvement projects in the villages, combined with a stepped up anti-guerrilla campaign by the military. Such a program is under way, but the Communists have had a 16 year start in any drive to woo the villagers.

This captured the flavor of the Kennedy Vietnam program, the public relations appearance of an independent, nationalist social revolution, without any real faith in the nationalists that the Administration was "stuck with." It was the "Diemismo" of the "miracle" period without Diem.

Several months later, in the *Times Magazine* of January 7, 1962, Trumbull fully supported the current U.S. position:

Right or wrong, and however much he may be criticized, President Ngo has no present outstanding rival as a national leader. Official Americans here, though often impatient with some of Ngo's repressive policies and his apparent reluctance to effect reforms, appear to have concluded that his leadership in the present emergency is an irreplaceable asset. Some Westerners who have made a specialty of studying the Vietnamese mind have suggested that a Mandarin is really what most of the people want.

When General Landsdale's report to President Kennedy was published in the May 20, 1961 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* in a version suitable for a mass media publication, it was called "The Report the President Wanted Published," and featured a picture of the President. The story itself, later made into a television film, "The Village That Refused to Die," told of a Catholic village's fight against alien Communist intruders. It brought a grim picture into the homes of *Saturday Evening Post* readers: "While Father Hoa sang the mass . . . scouts scurried in with reports of the approaching guerrillas. Father Hoa paused to give the firing order. Mortar fire commenced."

It was clear from Lansdale's description that the arms used by the Viet Cong were either captured from the Americans or manufactured by the guerrillas themselves. There is no mention of arms supplied by the North Vietnamese, Chinese, or Russians. But this was not the lesson of the article. The point was that Father Hoa's Catholic villagers had not been receiving sufficient arms. At first, they had had to recapture their weapons from the Viet Cong, but lately the Diem government had been supplying them with arms and money and the situation was getting better. If more and better arms could be systematically distributed to the villagers, the Communist menace could be defeated. The United States had a moral obligation to Vietnam. To drive home the message, Lansdale reported his sampling of peasant opinion: "Repeatedly they asked me for assurance that the U.S. would stand firm in its policy in Asia, and particularly in Laos."

Readers were left with the impression that Vietnamese peasants were eager to fight the Communist "aggressors," if only the United States would supply them with arms. The full report to the President, however, had indicated that few villagers in South Vietnam were inclined to fight against the Communists. It had pointed out that the Diem regime had still not carried out the social reforms necessary to win the allegiance of the population, and that this, not "invasion" or "infiltration," was the basic cause of the rise in Viet Cong insurgency. Lansdale's judgment that the renewed fighting was the result of the failures of the Diem regime and of U.S. policy obviously was not a part of the story President Kennedy wanted told to the readers of the *Saturday Evening Post*.

The *Post* returned to "The Village That Refused to Die" nine months later, to highlight an aspect of the U.S. aid program that had been successful—the work of the Catholic Refugee Committee. This report by John Schenche, however, in the issue of February 17, 1962, revealed that most of the inhabitants of the village, including Father Hoa, had been members of Chiang Kai-shek's army who had fled to Vietnam to escape Mao's army: "Many of them were refugees from Communist tyranny in China. Unlike some of their Vietnamese neighbors, the people of Binh Hung had the spirit and the courage to fight back." The U.S. government was now supplying Father Hoa's army of 1,000 soldiers with M-1 rifles and supplies; previously

the nature of communism in Vietnam, the needs of Vietnamese society, American goals there, and the need of American society for security.

Serious dialogue alone can keep alive the basic nerves of a democratic society—in fact, of any healthy society—for in the modern world, where masses of people are inevitably involved with, and affected by, public policies, a society cannot remain healthy if the important policies are solely the business of various elites. This is not merely a matter of ideology, but rather of the mechanics of power and the tone of a society. If the nerves of a people are dead and their political vitality sapped, the ideals of communism are no more possible than those of liberal capitalism.

In Eastern Europe, Soviet communism became involved in a ludicrous situation that presents it with continued instability and turmoil and has stained the ideology of communism. Writing about Hungary, Albert Camus created the phrase "socialism of the gallows" to describe the low point of an ideology that claimed to lead a civilization. But must we not also speak of the United States involvement in Vietnam in terms of a "democracy of the gallows"?

July 1965
Third Printing December 1965

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